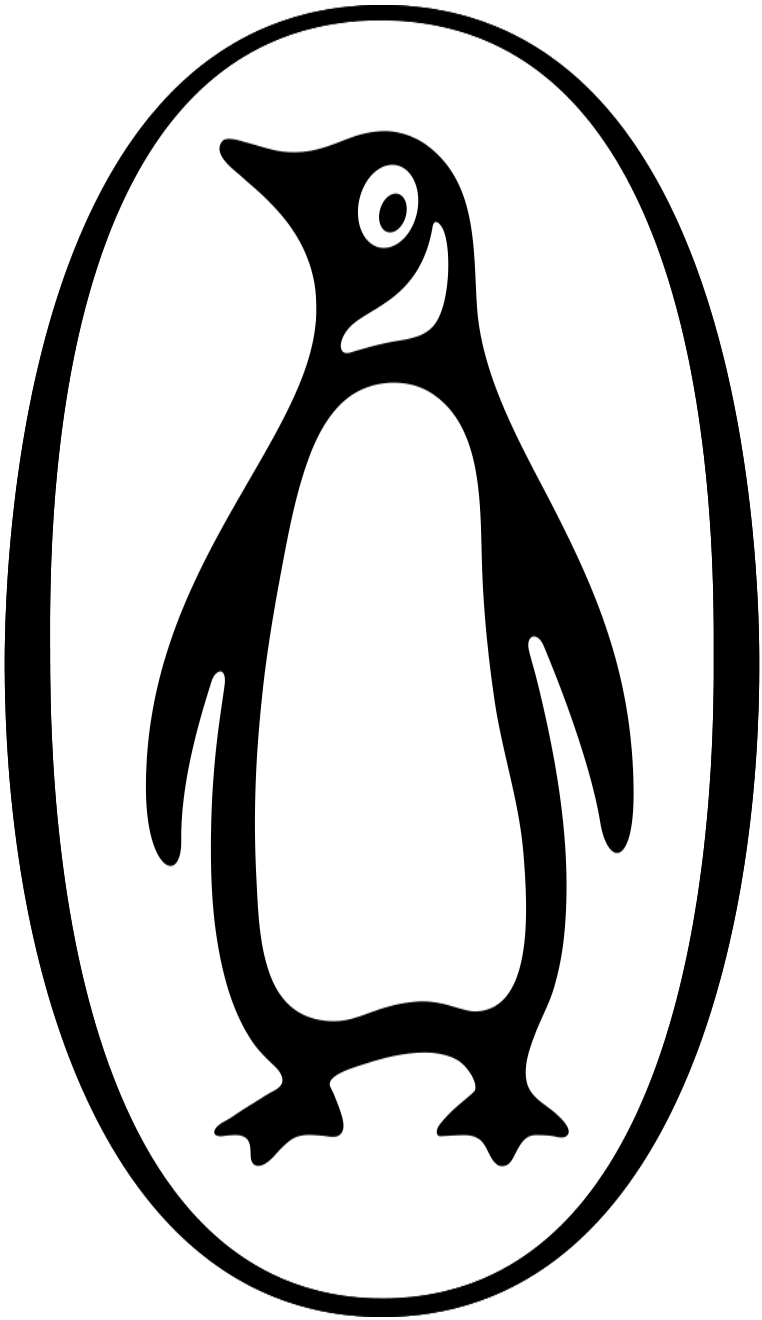

PENGUIN BOOKS

The Grapes of Wrath

Born in Salinas, California, in 1902, John Steinbeck grew up in a fertile agricultural valley about twenty-five miles from the Pacific Coast – and both valley and coast would serve as settings for some of his best fiction. In 1919 he went to Stanford University, where he intermittently enrolled in literature and writing courses until he left in 1925 without taking a degree. During the next five years he supported himself as a labourer and journalist in New York City, all the time working on his first novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929). After marriage and a move to Pacific Grove, he published two Californian fictions, *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and *To a God Unknown* (1933), and worked on short stories later collected in *The Long Valley* (1938). Popular success and financial security came only with *Tortilla Flat* (1935), stories about Monterey's paisanos. A ceaseless experimenter throughout his career, Steinbeck changed course regularly. Three powerful novels of the late 1930s focused on the Californian labouring class: *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and the book considered by many his finest, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). Early in the 1940s, Steinbeck became a filmmaker with *The Forgotten Village* (1941) and a serious student of marine biology with *Sea of Cortez* (1941). He devoted his services to the war, writing *Bombs Away* (1942) and the controversial play-novelette *The Moon is Down* (1942). *Cannery Row* (1945), *The Wayward Bus* (1947), *The Pearl* (1947), *A Russian Journal* (1948), another experimental drama, *Burning Bright* (1950), and *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1951) preceded publication of the monumental *East of Eden* (1952), an ambitious saga of the Salinas Valley and his own family's history. The last decades of his life were spent in New York City and Sag Harbor with his third wife, with whom he travelled widely. Later books include *Sweet Thursday* (1954), *The Short Reign of Pippin IV: A Fabrication* (1957), *Once There was a War* (1958), *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), *Travels with Charley in Search of America* (1962), *America and Americans* (1966) and the post-humously published *Journal of a Novel: The 'East of Eden' Letters* (1969), *Viva Zapata!* (1975), *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* (1976) and *Working Days: The Journals*

of 'The Grapes of Wrath' (1989). He died in 1968, having won a Nobel Prize in 1962.

Robert DeMott is Edwin and Ruth Kennedy Distinguished Professor at Ohio University, where he has received numerous undergraduate and graduate teaching awards, including the Jeanette G. Grasselli Faculty Teaching Award in 1997. He is a former director of the Center for Steinbeck Studies at San Jose State University, and is currently on the Editorial Board of the Center's *Steinbeck Newsletter*. He is Editor (with Elaine Steinbeck as Special Consultant) of the Library of America's three-volume edition of John Steinbeck's writings, of which *Novels and Stories, 1932–1937* (1994) and *The Grapes of Wrath and Other Writings, 1936–1942* (1996) have so far appeared. His annotated edition of John Steinbeck's *Working Days: The Journals of 'The Grapes of Wrath'* was chosen as a *New York Times* Notable Book in 1989, and his *Steinbeck's Typewriter: Essays on His Art* (1996) received the Nancy Dasher Book Award from the College English Association of Ohio in 1998.

JOHN STEINBECK

The Grapes of Wrath

With an Introduction by Robert DeMott

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To **CAROL** *who willed it.*
To **TOM** *who lived it.*

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Introduction

"What some people find in religion a writer may find in his craft… a kind of breaking through to glory."

—Steinbeck in a 1965 interview

I

On June 18, 1938, a little more than three weeks after starting *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck confided in his daily journal (posthumously published as *Working Days*):

> If I could do this book properly it would be one of the really fine books and a truly American book. But I am assailed with my own ignorance and inability. I'll just have to work from a background of these. Honesty. If I can keep an honesty it is all I can expect of my poor brain.… If I can do that it will be all my lack of genius can produce. For no one else knows my lack of ability the way I do. I am pushing against it all the time.

Despite Steinbeck's doubts, which were constant during its tumultuous process of composition, *The Grapes of Wrath* turned out to be not only a "fine" book, but the greatest of his seventeen novels. Steinbeck's agressive mixture of native philosophy, common-sense politics, blue-collar radicalism, working-class characters, folk wisdom, and home-spun literary form—all set to a bold, rhythmic style and nervy, raw dialogue—qualified the novel as the "American book" he had set out to write. The novel's title—from Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic"—was clearly in the American grain: "I like it because it is a march and this book is a kind of march—because it is in our own revolutionary tradition and because in reference to this book it has a large meaning," Steinbeck announced on September 10, 1938, to Elizabeth Otis, his literary agent.

After his arduous march of composition from late May through late October 1938("Never worked so hard in my life nor so long before," Steinbeck told Carl Wilhelmson), *The Grapes of Wrath* passed from his wife's typescript to published novel in a scant four months. In March 1939, when Steinbeck received copies from one of three advance printings, he told Pascal Covici, his editor at The

Viking Press, that he was “immensely pleased with them.” The novel’s impressive physical and aesthetic appearance was the result of its imposing length (619 pages) and Elmer Hader’s striking dustjacket illustration (which pictured the exiled Joads looking out on a lush California valley). And true to Steinbeck’s insistence that *The Grapes of Wrath* be “keyed into the American scene from the beginning,” Covici had insured that Viking Press printed words and music from the “Battle Hymn” on the book’s endpapers in an attempt (unsuccessfully, it turned out) to deflect accusations of communism against the novel.

Given the drastic plight of the migrant labor situation in California, Steinbeck refused to write a popular book or court commercial success. It was ironic, then, that shortly after its official publication date on April 14, 1939, fueled by the nearly ninety reviews—mostly positive—that appeared in newspapers, magazines, and literary journals between April and June, *The Grapes of Wrath* climbed to the top of the best-seller lists for most of the year, selling 428,900 copies in hardcover at $2. 75 each. (In 1941, when the Sun Dial Press issued a cloth reprint for a dollar, the publisher announced that more than 543,000 copies of *Grapes* had already been sold.) *The Grapes of Wrath* won the 1940 Pulitzer Prize (Steinbeck gave the $ 1000 prize to writer Ritch Lovejoy), eventually became the cornerstone of his 1962 Nobel Prize award, and proved itself to be among the most enduring works of fiction by any American author, past or present. In spite of the flaws its critics perceive (frequent sentimentality, flat characterizations, heavy-handed symbolism, unconvincing dialogue)—or perhaps because of them (general readers tend to embrace the book’s mystic soul and are less troubled by its imperfect body)—*The Grapes of Wrath* has resolutely entered both the American consciousness and its conscience. If a literary classic can be defined as a book that speaks directly to readers’ concerns in successive historical eras, then surely *The Grapes of Wrath* is such a work.

Although Steinbeck could not have predicted this success (and was nearly ruined by the notoriety it achieved), the fact is that, in the past half century, *The Grapes of Wrath* has sold more than 14 million copies. Many of them end up in the hands of students at schools and colleges where the novel is taught in literature and history classes at every level from junior high to doctoral seminars. The book has also had a charmed life on screen and stage. Steinbeck

sold the novel's film rights for $75,000 to producer Darryl F. Zanuck. Then Nunnally Johnson scripted a truncated film version, which was nonetheless memorably paced, photographed, and acted (especially by Henry Fonda as Tom Joad, Jane Darwell as Ma, and John Carradine as Jim Casy) under the direction of John Ford in 1940. (A "hard, straight picture… that looks and feels like a documentary film and… has a hard, truthful ring," Steinbeck reported after seeing its Hollywood preview.) Recently, Frank Galati faithfully adapted the novel for his Chicago-based Steppenwolf Company, whose Broadway production won a Tony Award as Best Play in 1990. *The Grapes of Wrath* has also been translated into nearly thirty languages. It seems that Steinbeck's words continue, in Warren French's apt phrase, "the education of the heart."

Every strong novel redefines our conception of the genre's dimensions and reorders our awareness of its possibilities. Like other products of rough-hewn American genius—Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (three other "flawed" novels that also humanize America's downtrodden by exposing social ills)—*The Grapes of Wrath* has a home-grown quality: part naturalistic epic, part jeremiad, part captivity narrative, part road novel, part transcendental gospel.

Many American authors, often with little in the way of a shared novelistic tradition to emulate, or finding that established fictional models don't suit their sensibilities, manage to forge their own way by synthesizing their personal vision and experience with a variety of cultural forms and literary styles. Steinbeck was no exception. To execute *The Grapes of Wrath* he drew on the jump-cut technique of John Dos Passos's *USA* trilogy (1937), the narrative tempo of Pare Lorentz's radio drama *Ecce Homo!* and the sequential quality of such Lorentz films as *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1937), the stark visual effects of Dorothea Lange's photographs of Dust Bowl Oklahoma and California migrant life, the timbre of the Greek epics, the rhythms of the King James Bible, the refrains of American folk music, and the biological impetus of his and Edward F. Ricketts's ecological phalanx, or group-man, theory. Steinbeck's imagination transformed these resources (especially biblical themes, parallels, analogies, and allusions) into his own holistic structure, his own individual signature. Malcolm Cowley's claim that a "whole literature is summarized in this book and much of it is carried to a

new level of excellence" is especially accurate.

In early July 1938, Steinbeck told literary critic Harry T. Moore that he was improvising what was for him a "new method" of fictional technique: one which combined a suitably elastic form and elevated style to express the far-reaching tragedy of the migrant drama. In *The Grapes of Wrath* he devised a contrapuntal structure, which alternates short lyrical chapters of exposition and background pertinent to the migrants as a group (Chapters 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29) with the long narrative chapters of the Joad family's dramatic exodus to California (Chapters 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 13, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30). Just as in *Moby-Dick* Melville created intensity and prolonged suspense by alternating between the temporal chapters of Ahab's driven quest for the white whale and Ishmael's numinous chapters on cetology, so Steinbeck structured his novel by juxtaposition. His "particular" chapters are the slow-paced and lengthy narrative chapters that embody traditional characterization and advance the dramatic plot, while his jazzy, rapid-fire "interchapters" work at another level of recognition by expressing an atemporal, universal, synoptic view of the migrant condition. As he wrote Chapters 5 and 6, for instance, Steinbeck reminded himself that for maximum effect, "I want the reader to be able to keep [the general and particular chapters] separate in his mind." In fact, his "general" or intercalary chapters ("pace changers," Steinbeck called them) were expressly designed to "hit the reader below the belt. With the rhythms and symbols of poetry one can get into a reader—open him up and while he is open introduce things on a [sic] intellectual level which he would not or could not receive unless he were opened up," Steinbeck revealed to Columbia undergraduate Herbert Sturz in 1953.

The Grapes of Wrath is an engaged novel with a partisan posture, many complex voices, and passionate prose styles. ("No other American novel has succeeded in forging and making instrumental so many prose styles," Peter Lisca believes.) Except for its unflinching treatment of the Great Depression's climatic, social, and economic conditions, and those interchapters that serve to halt the emotional slide toward sentimentality, there is nothing cynically distanced about it, nothing coolly modernist, in the way we have come to understand the elite literary implications of that term in the past seventy-five years. (*The Grapes of Wrath* is in some ways an

old-fashioned novel, even down to its curious avoidance of human sexuality.) It is not narrated from the first-person point of view, yet the language has a consistently catchy eyewitness quality about it, and its vivid biblical, empirical, poetical, cinematic, and folk styles demonstrate the remarkable tonal and visual acuity of Steinbeck's ear and eye.

Steinbeck told Merle Armitage on February 17, 1939, that in "composition, in movement, in tone and in scope," *The Grapes of Wrath* was "symphonic." Indeed, his fusion of intimate narrative and panoramic editorial chapters enforces this dialogic concert. Chapters, styles, voices all speak to each other, set up resonances, send echoes back and forth—point and counterpoint, strophe and antistrophe—as in a huge symphony whose total impression far surpasses the sum of its discrete and sometimes dissonant parts. Steinbeck's novel belongs to that vital class of fictions whose shape issues not from an ideal blueprint of aesthetic propriety but from the generative urgency of its author's experience. ("It *had* to be written," Stanley Kunitz said in 1939.) Steinbeck's direct involvement with the plight of America's Dust Bowl migrants in the latter half of the 1930s created his obsessive urge to tell their story honestly but also movingly. "This must be a good book," he wrote in *Working Days* on June 10, 1938. "It simply must. I haven't any choice. It must be far and away the best thing I have ever attempted —slow but sure, piling detail on detail until a picture and an experience emerge. Until the whole throbbing thing emerges."

Making his audience see and feel that living picture was paramount. "I am not writing a satisfying story," he claimed to Pascal Covici on January 16, 1939:

> I've done my damndest to rip a reader's nerves to rags, I don't want him satisfied. … I tried to write this book the way lives are being lived not the way books are written.… Throughout I've tried to make the reader participate in the actuality, what he takes from it will be scaled entirely on his own depth or hollowness. There are five layers in this book, a reader will find as many as he can and he won't find more than he has in himself.

Steinbeck's participatory aesthetic was based on a circle of complicity that linked "the trinity" of writer, text, and reader to ensure maximum affective impact. On June 7, 1938, as he completed Chapter 5, for instance, he kept his eye steadily on target: "Today's work is the overtone of the tractors, the men who

run them, the men they displace, the sound of them, the smell of them. I've got to get this over. Got to because this one's tone is very important—this is the eviction sound and the tonal reason for movement. Must do it well."

Steinbeck conceived his novel on simultaneous levels of existence, ranging from socio-economic determinism to transcendent spirituality. Louis Owens explains how, for example, biblical parallels in *The Grapes of Wrath* illuminate four of Steinbeck's layers:

> On one level it is the story of a family's struggle for survival in the Promised Land…. On another level it is the story of a people's struggle, the migrants'. On a third level it is the story of a nation, America. On still another level, through… the allusions to Christ and those to the Israelites and Exodus, it becomes the story of mankind's quest for profound comprehension of his commitment to his fellow man and to the earth he inhabits.

Thus Steinbeck pushed back the accepted boundaries of traditional mimetic fiction and redefined the proletarian form. Like all truly significant American novels, *The Grapes of Wrath* does not offer codified solutions. Even though it treats with privilege a particular section of the migrant labor scene (Steinbeck ignores the problems of nonwhite migrant workers—Filipinos, Chinese, Japanese, and Mexicans—who made up a significant percentage of California's agricultural labor force, according to Carey McWilliams), his book still speaks to the universal experience of human disenfranchisement, still holds out hope for human advancement. At every level *The Grapes of Wrath* enacts the process of its author's belief and embodies the shape of his faith, as in this ringing synthesis from Chapter 14.

> The last clear definite function of man—muscles aching to work, minds aching to create beyond the single need—this is man. To build a wall, to build a house, a dam, and in the wall and house and dam to put something of Manself, and to Manself take back something of the wall, the house, the dam; to take hard muscles from the lifting, to take the clear lines and form from conceiving. For man, unlike any other thing organic or inorganic in the universe, grows beyond his work, walks up the stairs of his concepts, emerges ahead of his accomplishments.

Behind this most public of American novels stands a reclusive writer. John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California, on February 27, 1902, to respectable middle-class parents: John Ernst Steinbeck, Monterey County treasurer, and Olive Hamilton Steinbeck, a former schoolteacher. Steinbeck attended Salinas High School, where he was an undistinguished student, then enrolled sporadically at Stanford University from 1919 to 1925. There, as an English-journalism major, he took a short-story writing class from Edith Mirrielees and was published in Stanford's undergraduate literary magazine, but he never finished his degree. He held a variety of temporary jobs during the next four years (laborer and cub reporter in New York City, resort handyman and watchman in Lake Tahoe), eventually publishing his first novel, *Cup of Gold*, in 1929. The novel scarcely sold, but Steinbeck's choice of vocation was sealed. He never again held a traditional nine-to-five job. Beginning in 1930, with the support and encouragement of his parents and especially of his wife, Carol Henning Steinbeck, whom he had married that year, writing became Steinbeck's daily occupation and continued so through lean and flush times for the remainder of his life. When Steinbeck died on December 20, 1968, he had managed to support himself and his families (he was married three times and had two sons and one stepdaughter) exclusively on his writing income, primarily from the thirty books of fiction, drama, filmscripts, and nonfictional prose he published between 1929 and 1966.

Cup of Gold, a swashbuckling historical romance based on the life of seventeenth-century Welsh buccaneer Henry Morgan, gave no indication that Steinbeck would eventually be capable of producing a graphic novel with the startling originality, magnitude, compassion, and power of *The Grapes of Wrath*. What transpired in those ten years is as arresting an example of determined, self-willed artistic growth as we have in American letters, for in the nine volumes of prose (mostly fiction) he produced in the 1930s, Steinbeck simply got stronger and stronger as a novelist. His achievement is especially moving because he rarely thought of himself as a natural genius and rarely believed he had ever "arrived" as a writer. This typical self-assessment is recorded in *Working Days* (Steinbeck's journal is the hermetic story behind the making of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the writer's private text behind the reader's public one): "I was not made for success. I find myself with

a growing reputation. In many ways it is a terrible thing.... Among other things I feel that I have put something over. That this little success of mine is cheating."

Steinbeck augmented his talent with plain hard work and repeated practice. Where his characters use tools to elevate work to a dignified level, Steinbeck turned to his "comfortable and comforting" pen, an instrument that became an "extension" of the best part of himself: "Work is the only good thing," he claimed on July 6, 1938, in *Working Days*. For Steinbeck, writing was a kind of textual habitation. He wrote books methodically the way other people built houses—word by word, sentence by sentence. His act of writing was a way of fulfilling his dream of finding a home in the architectural spaces created by his imagination. In fact, this creative and interior level of engagement is the elusive, unacknowledged fifth layer of Steinbeck's novel. Although Steinbeck insisted on effacing his own presence in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the fact remains that it is a very personal book, rooted in his own compulsion. The "plodding" pace of Steinbeck's writing schedule informed the slow, "crawling" movement of the Joads' journey, while the harried beat of his own life gave the proper "feel" and tone to his beleaguered characters. Their unsavory weaknesses and vanities, their struggles for survival, their unsuspecting heroism are Steinbeck's as well. If *The Grapes of Wrath* praises the honorableness of labor and ratifies the obsessive quest for a home, it is because the author himself felt these twin acts called into being the most committed, the most empathetic, the most resourceful qualities of the human psyche.

By nature Steinbeck was not a collaborator. "Unless a writer is capable of solitude he should leave books alone and go into the theatre," he exclaimed years later. Solitude was an increasingly precious commodity in Steinbeck's life because intrusions conspired to paralyze his will and disrupt his concentration. "Every book seems the struggle of a whole life," he lamented in *Working Days*. A grass-growing mood was rarely his, so he managed as best he could within his constraints. Although it didn't always ensure complete solitude, Steinbeck often sequestered himself in the eight-by-eight-foot work room of Arroya del Ajo (Garlic Gulch), the house he and Carol built in 1936 on Greenwood Lane in Los Gatos: "Just big enough for a bed and a desk and a gun rack and a little book case. I like to sleep in the room I work in," he told George Albee.

The Grapes of Wrath's communal vision began in the fire of Steinbeck's own labor, but the flames were fanned by numerous people, especially Carol Steinbeck and Tom Collins. Carol Steinbeck (1906–1983), his outgoing first wife, was far more politically radical than John, and she actively supported northern California's local fugitive agricultural labor movement before he did. (According to his biographer, Jackson J. Benson, Steinbeck was not much interested in doctrinaire political theories at this point in his career.) Carol was an energetic, talented person in her own right, who agreed to relinquish a possible career in favor of helping to manage his. Their partnership and marriage was smoother and more egalitarian in the struggling years of Steinbeck's career; with the enormous success—and pressures—brought first by *Of Mice and Men* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1937), and then by *The Grapes of Wrath*, their situation became more tenuous and volatile. Carol was an extremely strong-willed, demonstrative person, and she was often frustrated, resentful, and sometimes jealous; John, inordinately shy, was frequently beleaguered, confused, and demanding. In the late 1930s, whenever John was writing daily, which was much of the time, Carol handled—but didn't always like—most of the routine domestic duties. She also shielded her husband as much as possible from unwarranted disruptions and intrusions, and she oversaw some of the financial arrangements (an increasingly large job) between Stein-beck and his literary agents. "Carol does so much," Steinbeck admitted on August 2, 1938.

Carol also served as his cultural envoy and stand-in. In January 1938, on a trip to New York City, she met with documentary film-maker Pare Lorentz (1905–1992), arranging between them his first visit to Los Gatos to discuss a joint Steinbeck-Lorentz movie version of *In Dubious Battle* (which was never made) and a private showing of *The River* and *The Plow That Broke the Plains*. These pioneering documentary films, which Lorentz made for President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal-inspired Resettlement Administration (fore-runner of the Farm Security Administration), dealt with human displacement and natural erosion caused by the Dust Bowl and Mississippi Valley floods. After their initial meeting, Lorentz became an increasingly important figure in the novelist's life, providing everything from practical advice on politics to spirited artistic cheerleading.

Carol left her stamp on *The Grapes of Wrath* in many ways. She

typed the manuscript, editing the text as she went along, and she served in the early stages as a rigorous critical commentator (after typing three hundred pages, she confessed to Elizabeth Otis that she had lost "all sense of proportion" and felt unfit "to judge it at all"). In a brilliant stroke, on September 2, Carol chose the novel's title from Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," perhaps inspired by her hearing of Pare Lorentz's radio drama, *Ecce Homo!*, which ends with a martial version of Howe's song. Steinbeck was impressed with "the looks of it—marvelous title. The book has being at last"; he considered it "Carol's best title so far." ("Tell Carol she is a whiz at picking titles and she has done it again with the new one," his drama agent, Annie Laurie Williams, exulted.) Her role as facilitator is recorded permanently in one half of the novel's dedication: "To CAROL who willed it." On February 23, 1939, Steinbeck told Pascal Covici that he had given Carol the holograph manuscript of *The Grapes of Wrath:*"You see I feel that this is Carol's book."

Eventually, however, Steinbeck's heart changed its tune. Carol's brittle efficiency, managerial brusqueness, and violent mood swings seemed to cause more problems than they solved. She, too, was exhausted by the novel's completion and at her wit's end over its histrionic reception: "The telephone never stops ringing, telegrams all the time, fifty to seventy-five letters a day all wanting something. People who won't take no for an answer sending books to be signed…. Something has to be worked out or I am finished writing. I went south to work and I came back to find Carol just about hysterical. She had been pushed beyond endurance," Steinbeck told Elizabeth Otis on June 22, 1939. His involvement with a much younger woman, a Hollywood singer named Gwyndolyn Conger, whom he met in mid- 1939 and who quickly came to represent everything Steinbeck felt romantically lacking in Carol, signaled the beginning of the end of their marriage. They separated rancorously in 1941 and divorced two years later.

The second part of the novel's dedication—"To TOM who lived it"—refers to Thomas Collins (1897?–1961), the novelist's chief source, guide, discussant, and chronicler of accurate migrant information. Collins not only put Steinbeck in touch with the real-life prototypes of the Joads and Jim Casy, but he himself served as Steinbeck's real-life prototype for Jim Rawley, the fictional manager of the Weedpatch government camp. That camp, an accurate rendering of Collins's Arvin camp, became an oasis of relief for the

harried Joads and is featured in Chapters 22 to 26 of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck portrayed Collins with photographic accuracy in Chapter 22: “A little man dressed all in white stood behind [Ma Joad]—a man with a thin, brown, lined face and merry eyes. He was as lean as a picket. His white clean clothes were frayed at the seams.” Steinbeck also caught Collins’s effective interpersonal technique in having Jim Rawley wear frayed clothes and win over Ma Joad by the simple request of asking for a cup of her coffee.

An intrepid, resourceful, and exceptionally compassionate man, Collins was the manager of a model Farm Security Administration camp, located in Kern County at the southern end of California’s Central Valley. The Arvin Sanitary Camp was one of several proposed demonstration camps intended to provide humane, clean, democratic—but temporary—living conditions for the growing army of migrant workers entering California from the lower Middle West and Dust Bowl region. (More than two dozen camps were planned in 1935 by the Resettlement Administration; by 1940, with New Deal budgets slashed by conservatives in Congress, only fifteen were actually completed or under construction.) Collins possessed a genius for camp administration. Labor historian Anne Loftis calls Collins a “hands on” administrator; he had the right mix of fanaticism, vision, and tactfulness. He and Steinbeck, both Rooseveltian Democrats, hit it off immediately in the late summer of 1936, when the novelist went south on the first of several grueling research trips with Collins during the next two years to investigate field conditions. (One of the many legends that grew up around *The Grapes of Wrath* purported that Steinbeck traveled with a migrant family all the way from Oklahoma to California; that never happened, though he and Carol did follow Route 66 home on a car trip from Chicago to Los Gatos in 1937.)

Fortunately, Collins was a punctual and voluminous report writer (a plan to publish his reports eventually fell through). His lively weekly accounts of the workers’ activities, events, diets, entertainments, sayings, beliefs, and observations provided Steinbeck with a ready documentary supplement to his own research. In a section called “Bits of Migrant Wisdom,” noted in Collins’s “Kern Migratory Labor Camp Report for week ending May 2, 1936,” he records a discussion with two women about how best to cut down on the use of toilet paper: “One suggested sprinkling red pepper through the roll. The other suggested a wire be attached

to the roll so that every time a sheet was torn off the big bell placed on the outside of the building for the purpose would ring and let everyone know who was in the sanitary unit and what she was doing." Steinbeck saw the humor in the account and utilized some of the original material in Chapter 22: "'Hardly put a roll out 'fore it's gone. Come right up in meetin'. One lady says we oughta have a little bell that rings ever' time the roll turns oncet. Then we could count how many ever'body takes.' She shook her head. 'I jes' don' know,' she said. 'I been worried all week. Somebody's a-stealin' toilet paper from Unit Four.'" Collins guided Steinbeck through the intricacies of the agricultural labor scene, put him in direct contact with migrant families, and permitted Steinbeck to incorporate "great gobs" of information into his own writing. "Letter from Tom…. He is so good. I need this stuff. It is exact and just the thing that will be used against me if I am wrong," Steinbeck noted in *Working Days* on June 24, 1938.

In 1939, at Steinbeck's suggestion, Collins worked as a well-paid technical advisor to John Ford's Twentieth Century-Fox production of *The Grapes of Wrath*.("Tom will howl his head off if they get out of hand," Steinbeck told Elizabeth Otis.) And later—probably spurred by the success of both novel and film—Collins himself (under the pseudonym of Windsor Drake) wrote an autobiographical-fictional memoir, to which Steinbeck, who appears as a character, added a foreword: "Windsor and I traveled together, sat in the ditches with the migrant workers, lived and ate with them. We heard a thousand miseries and a thousand jokes. We ate fried dough and sow belly, worked with the sick and the hungry, listened to complaints and little triumphs." The book was accepted but never reached print because the publisher reneged on the deal. After that, Collins resigned from the F.S.A., and he and Steinbeck passed out of each other's lives.

Clearly, Steinbeck had a knack for associating himself with gifted, generous people. George West, chief editorial writer for the progressive San Francisco *News*, was the man who instigated Steinbeck's initial investigations of the migrant labor situation for his paper (to be discussed below). Frederick R. Soule, the enlightened regional information advisor at the San Francisco office of the Farm Security Administration, and his assistant, Helen Horn, provided statistics and documents for his *News* reports and otherwise opened official doors for Steinbeck that might have

stayed closed. Soule's colleague Eric Thomsen, regional director in charge of management at the F.S.A. office in San Francisco, personally escorted Steinbeck to the Central Valley and introduced him to Tom Collins at the Arvin Camp for the first time. (Jackson J. Benson was the first to recognize that, in a convoluted and unintentional way, the federal government underwrote Steinbeck's research.) A continent away, in Manhattan, Steinbeck's publisher, the intrepid and irrepressible Pascal Covici (1888–1964), kept up a running dialogue with the novelist. In his literary agents he was triply blessed. Mavis McIntosh, Elizabeth Otis, and Annie Laurie Williams not only kept his professional interests uppermost at all times but did so with the kind of selflessness that made them more like family members than business managers. Of the three women, Elizabeth Otis (1901–1981) became his most trusted confidante.

III

Steinbeck lived to write. He believed it was redemptive work, a transformative act. Each day, after warming up with a letter to Otis or Covici and an entry in *Working Days*, he created a disciplined working rhythm and maintained what he called a "unity feeling"—a sense of continuity and habitation with his material. "Let the damn book go three hundred thousand words if it wants to. This is my life. Why should I want to finish my own life? The confidence is on me again. I can feel it. It's stopping work that does the damage," he admitted in *Working Days* on July 7, 1938. Ideally, for a few hours each day, the world Steinbeck created took precedence over the one in which he lived. Because both worlds can be considered "real," at times during 1938 Steinbeck didn't know where one began and the other left off; walking back into the domestic world from the world of imagination was not always a smooth shift for him (or for Carol). His work demanded his attention so fully that he finally refused to dissipate his energy in extra-literary pursuits: "I won't do any of these public things. Can't. It isn't my nature and I won't be stampeded. And so the stand must be made and I must keep out of politics," he promised himself.

Steinbeck's doubts about his ability to carry out the plan of his novel surface repeatedly in his working journal, but he rarely questioned the risks involved in bringing his whole sensibility to

bear upon it. Like Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, that other populist manifesto of the American spirit, Steinbeck's novel had a complicated growth process. *The Grapes of Wrath* was the product of his increasing immersion in the migrant material, which proved to be a Pandora's box. It required an extended odyssey before he discovered the proper focus and style to do the topic justice. In one way or another, from August 1936, when Steinbeck discovered a subject "like nothing in the world," through October 1939, when he resolved in *Working Days* to put behind him "that part of my life that made the *Grapes*," the migrant issue, which had wounded him deeply, remained his central preoccupation. He produced a seven-part series of newspaper articles, "The Harvest Gypsies," an unfinished novel, "The Oklahomans," a completed but destroyed satire, "L'Affaire Lettuceberg," and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Each version shared a fixed core of elements: on one side, the entrenched power, wealth, authority, and consequent tyranny of California's industrialized agricultural system (symbolized by Associated Farmers, Inc.), which produced flagrant violations of the migrants' civil and human rights and ensured their continuing peonage, their loss of dignity, through threats, reprisals, and violence; on the other side, the powerlessness, poverty, victimization, and fear of the nomadic American migrants whose willingness to work, desire to retain their dignity, and enduring wish to settle land of their own were kept alive by their innate resilience and resourcefulness and by the democratic benefits of the government sanitary camps. From the moment he entered the fray, Steinbeck had no doubt that the presence of the migrants would change the fabric of California life, though he had little foresight about what his own role in that change would be. His concern was humanitarian: he wanted to be an effective advocate, but he did not want to appear presumptuous. "Every effort I can bring to bear is and has been at the call of the common working people to the end that they may eat what they raise, use what they produce, and in every way and in completeness share in the works of their hands and their heads," he declared unequivocally to San Francisco *News* columnist John Barry.

Not counting the scotched plan to edit and publish Collins's reports, an abandoned play set in a squatters' camp in Kern County, or a warm-up essay (in the September 12, 1936, issue of *The Nation*), Steinbeck's first lengthy excursion into the migrants' problems was published in the liberal, pro-labor San Francisco

News. "The Harvest Gypsies" formed the foundation of Steinbeck's concern for a long time to come, raised issues and initiated forces, gave him a working vocabulary with which to understand current events, and furthered his position as a reliable interpreter. This stage resulted from the notoriety caused by his recently published strike novel, *In Dubious Battle* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1936), after which Steinbeck found—often against his will—that he was fast being considered a sympathetic spokesman for the contemporary agricultural labor situation in a state that was primarily pro-management. This was a profound irony, because while *In Dubious Battle* exposed the capitalist dynamics of corporate farming, it took no side for or against labor, preferring instead to see the fruit strike as a symbol of "man's eternal, bitter warfare with himself."

At George West's invitation, Steinbeck produced "The Harvest Gypsies." These articles, peppered with Dorothea Lange's graphic photographs of migrants, appeared from October 5 to 12, 1936. Steinbeck's gritty reports detailed the plan of California's feudal agricultural labor industry. The pieces introduced the antagonists, underscored the anachronistic rift between the Okie agrarian past and the mechanized California present, explained the economic background and insidious effects of the labor issue, examined the deplorable migrant living conditions, and exposed the unconscionable practices of the interlocking conglomerate of corporation farms. (These elements remained central to the core and texture of *The Grapes of Wrath*.) Primarily, though, Steinbeck's eye was on the migrants, who were "gypsies by force of circumstance," as he announced in his opening piece: "And so they move, frantically, with starvation close behind them. And in this series of articles we shall try to see how they live and what kind of people they are, what their living standard is, what is done for them, and what their problems and needs are. For while California has been successful in its use of migrant labor, it is gradually building a human structure which will certainly change the state, and may, if handled with the inhumanity and stupidity that have characterized the past, destroy the present system of agricultural economics."

Written mostly in a measured style to promote understanding and intelligent solutions, Steinbeck's articles are full of case studies, chilling factual statistics, and an unsettling catalogue of human woes (illness, incapacitation, persecution, death) observed from

close contact with field workers he had met. In the spirit of advocacy journalism, Steinbeck concluded with prophetic recommendations for alleviating the conflict with federal aid and local support; this in turn would create subsistence farms, establish a migratory labor board, encourage unionization, and punish terrorism. When they were published in 1936(and again when they were reprinted as *Their Blood Is Strong*, a pamphlet by the nonprofit Simon J. Lubin Society that sold 10,000 copies), Steinbeck's articles solidified his credibility—both in and out of the migrant camps—as a serious commentator in a league with Dorothea Lange's husband, Paul Taylor, and Carey McWilliams, two other influential and respected investigators.

Steinbeck understood that the migrants wouldn't vanish from sight, even though official California hoped they would. He also knew that the subject reached further than he had first imagined. Consequently, Steinbeck built on his *News* pieces and made at least one more monthlong field trip with Tom Collins in October and November of 1937. They started from Gridley, where Collins was managing a new camp, but then roamed California from Stockton to Needles, wherever migrants were gathered to work. His purpose was to gather more research for his next version, the "big" book of fiction that had been in his mind for most of that year. (A letter to Elizabeth Otis, written on January 27, 1937, indicates that he had been wrestling with this version since the previous winter: "The new book has struck a bad snag…. The subject is so huge it scares me to death.") In an interview with Dorothy Steel on November 4, 1937, in the Los Gatos *Mail News*, Steinbeck told of starting a book whose topic was the Dust Bowl refugees, the "Oklahomans." Though he was "reluctant to discuss the characters and plot," he said it was "one third complete and will be about 1000 pages in length." Given his comment to Otis, and the fact that Steinbeck traveled a good deal that year, three hundred pages of completed manuscript may have been wishful thinking on his part, or it may have represented the total number of pages of reports and research notes he had accumulated thus far.

In a second interview two months later, with journalist Louis Walther on January 8, 1938, in the San Jose *Mercury Herald*, he apparently had not progressed much, if at all. After hitting several "snags," he was working on a "rather long novel" called "The Oklahomans," which was "still a long way from finished."

Steinbeck, generally guarded with interviewers, revealed enough to Walther to indicate that his novel's focus was the salutary, irrepressible character of the "southern dust bowl immigrants" who, he believed, would profoundly alter the tenor of life in California. "Their coming here now is going to change things almost as much as did the coming of the first American settlers." Furthermore, "the Californian doesn't know what he does want. The Oklahoman knows just exactly what he wants. He wants a piece of land. And he goes after it and gets it." (In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck did not relinquish his land-hunger theme, or his belief that the migrants formed a specific phalanx group within the large national mass movement of the 1930s, but he certainly dropped his imperious tone.)

Quietly, as nearly as can be determined, between January and March of 1938, Steinbeck stopped work on "The Oklahomans." He never mentioned it again by name, the manuscript has never been found, and—his boasts of three hundred completed pages aside—it is doubtful that he had actually written a substantial amount at all on it. In the first entry of *Working Days*, on February 7[?], 1938, he mentioned having written "ten pages" of an otherwise unidentified book. And six weeks later, on March 23, 1938, he again told Elizabeth Otis: "I've been writing on the novel but I've had to destroy it several times. I don't seem to know any more about writing a novel than I did ten years ago. You'd think I would learn. I suppose I could dash it off but I want this one to be a pretty good one. There's another difficulty too. I'm trying to write history while it is happening and I don't want to be wrong." These comments in February and March 1938 have long been thought to refer to the beginnings of "L'Affaire Lettuceberg" (discussed below), but they could as easily refer to one (or more) avatars of "The Oklahomans," the Ur-*Grapes of Wrath*, which had not yet found its proper impetus or creative urgency. But in mulling over, rehearsing, and living with this big subject for so long, Steinbeck was staking his claim to its imaginative territory and experimenting with a way to fictionalize material that was, until then, the stuff of journalistic reportage.

The migrant situation had worsened, and along with it, Steinbeck's capacity for anger and his need for direct involvement had grown. The misery of the workers' condition was increasing in the winter of 1938, especially in Visalia and Nipomo, where thousands of families were marooned by floods. From Los Gatos,

Steinbeck wrote to Elizabeth Otis in February:

> I must go over into the interior valleys. There are about five thousand families starving to death over there, not just hungry but actually starving. The government is trying to feed them and get medical attention to them with the fascist group of utilities and banks and huge growers sabotaging the thing all along the line…. In one tent there are twenty people quarantined for smallpox and two of the women are to have babies in that tent this week. I've tied into the thing from the first and I must get down there and see it and see if I can't do something to help knock these murderers on the heads…. They think that if these people are allowed to live in camps with proper sanitary facilities, they will organize and that is the bugbear of the large landowner and the corporation farmer. The states and counties will give them nothing because they are outsiders. But the crops of any part of this state could not be harvested without these outsiders. I'm pretty mad about it.

In late February and early March, Steinbeck witnessed these deplorable conditions firsthand at Visalia where, after three weeks of steady rain, "the water is a foot deep in the tents and the children are up on the beds and there is no food and no fire, and the county has taken off all the nurses because 'the problem is so great that we can't do anything about it.' So they do nothing," he again informed Elizabeth Otis on March 7, 1938. In the company of Tom Collins, *Life* photographer Horace Bristol (whose work appears on the cover), and other F.S.A. personnel, Steinbeck worked day and night for nearly two weeks, sometimes dropping in the mud from exhaustion, to help relieve the people's misery, though of course no aid seemed adequate. Steinbeck was supposed to be doing an article for *Life* magazine, but what he encountered was so devastating, he told Otis, that he was utterly transfixed by the "staggering" conditions; the "suffering" was so great that objective reporting would only falsify the moment. Suddenly, Steinbeck realized that the issue was not as simple as portraying the "naive directness" of the migrants' desire for land. Indeed, the cauldron of his own soul was beginning to boil with frustration and impotence. Apparently neither "The Oklahomans" nor the proposed magazine article could adequately redress the injustices he had recently witnessed. "When I wrote *The Grapes of Wrath*," he declared in a 1952 Voice of America radio interview, "I was filled… with certain angers… at people who were doing injustices to other people."

As a novelist, Steinbeck often experienced a delayed reaction to piercing events. Perhaps as early as February—but certainly no later than early April ("New book goes very fast but I am afraid it is

pretty lousy. I don't care much," he said to Otis on April 26, 1938) —through approximately mid-May 1938, Steinbeck worked at the third stage of his effort and produced "L'Affaire Lettuceberg." With this abortive—but necessary—side-track venture, Steinbeck's migrant subject matter took its most drastic turn, inspired by an ugly event in Salinas, California, his home town. Earlier, in September 1936, Steinbeck had encountered the vicious clash between workers and growers in a lettuce strike: "There are riots in Salinas and killings in the streets of that dear little town where I was born," he told novelist George Albee. The strike was smashed with "fascist" terrorism, and recollections of the workers' defeat festered in Steinbeck for more than a year. "I am treasonable enough not to believe in the liberty of a man or a group to exploit, torment, or slaughter other men or groups. I believe in the despotism of human life and happiness against the liberty of money and possessions," he said in a 1937 statement for the League of American Writers.

Perhaps as early as the first week of February 1938—and no later than the first week of April—galvanized by reports of the worsening conditions in Visalia and Nipomo, he felt the urgent need to do something direct in retaliation. John Steinbeck never became what committed activists would consider fully radicalized (his writings stemmed more from his own feelings and humane sensibility than from the persuasiveness of the left's economic and social ideas), but by putting his pen to the service of his cause, he was as close to being a firebrand as he ever would. He launched into "L'Affaire," a vituperative satire aimed at attacking the leading citizens of Salinas, who put together a cabal of organizers called "the committee of seven" to foment the ignorant army of vigilantes (assembled from the common populace of Salinas—clerks, service-station operators, shopkeepers). "L'Affaire Lettuceberg" was a detour from his main concern for the migrant workers, already recorded in "The Harvest Gypsies" and adumbrated in "The Oklahomans" rehearsals. In fact, "L'Affaire" wasn't "literary" at all, but a "vulgar" tract concocted to do a specific job. Around mid-May 1938, Steinbeck, who had already written approximately 60,000 words (and was aiming for 10,000 more), confessed to Annie Laurie Williams: "I'll have the first draft of this book done in about two weeks…. And it is a vicious book, a mean book. I don't know whether it will be any good at all. It might well be very lousy but it has a lot of poison in

it that I had to get out of my system and this is a good way to do it."

Within days, however, Steinbeck wrote to Otis and Covici (who had already announced the publication of "L'Affaire") to inform them that he would not be delivering the manuscript they expected:

> This is going to be a hard letter to write.... This book is finished and it is a bad book and I must get rid of it. It can't be printed. It is bad because it isn't honest. Oh! these incidents all happened but—I'm not telling as much of the truth about them as I know. In satire you have to restrict the picture and I just can't do satire. ... I know, you could sell possibly 30,000 copies. I know that a great many people would think they liked the book. I myself have built up a hole-proof argument on how and why I liked it. I can't beat the argument but I don't like the book. And I would be doing Pat a greater injury in letting him print it than I would by destroying it. Not once in the writing of it have I felt the curious warm pleasure that comes when work is going well. My whole work drive has been aimed at making people understand each other and then I deliberately write this book the aim of which is to cause hatred through partial understanding. My father would have called it a smart-alec book. It was full of tricks to make people ridiculous. If I can't do better I have slipped badly. And that I won't admit, yet.

The final stage of writing culminated in *The Grapes of Wrath*. His conscience squared, his integrity restored, Steinbeck quickly embarked on the longest sustained writing job of his early career. Ridding himself of poison by passing through a "bad" book proved beneficial, he told Otis on June 1, 1938: "It is a nice thing to be working and believing in my work again. I hope I can keep the drive.... I only feel whole and well when it is this way." Naturally, his partisanship for the workers and his sense of indignation at California's labor situation carried over, but they were given a more articulate and directed shape.

From late May 1938, when he put the first words of the new novel to paper ("To the red country and part of the gray country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth"), through the winter of 1939, when the last of the corrections and editorial details were settled ("I meant, Pat, to print *all all all* the verses of the Battle Hymn. They're all pertinent and they're all exciting. And the music if you can"), *The Grapes of Wrath* was a task that fully commanded his artistic energy and attention. Everything he had written earlier—from his 1936 *Nation* article, "Dubious Battle in California," through "Starvation Under the Orange Trees," an April 1938 essay that functioned as the epilogue to *Their Blood Is Strong*, and even a poignant short story called

"Breakfast" that he included in *The Long Valley* (New York: The Viking Press, 1938)—became grist for his final attempt. "For the first time I am working on a book that is not limited and that will take every bit of experience and thought and feeling that I have," he wrote in *Working Days* on June 11, 1938. From his numerous field travels with Tom Collins, and from countless hours spent talking to migrant people, working beside them, listening to them, and sharing their problems, Steinbeck summoned all the concrete details of human form, language, and landscape that ensure artistic verisimilitude, as well as the subtler imaginative nuances of dialect, idiosyncratic tics, habits, and gestures that animate fictional characterization. "Yesterday it seemed to me that the people were coming to life. I hope so. These people must be intensely alive the whole time. I was worried about Rose of Sharon. She has to emerge if only as a silly pregnant girl now. Noah I think I'll lose for the time being and Uncle John and maybe for a while Casy. But I want to keep Tom and Ma together. Lots of people walking along the roads in this season. I can hear their voices," he wrote in *Working Days* on July 8.

From the outset, in creating the Joad family to occupy the narrative chapters of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck endowed his novel with a specific human context, a felt emotional quality, and a dramatic dimension his earlier versions lacked: "Begin the detailed description of the family I am to live with. Must take time in the description, detail, detail, looks, clothes, gestures…. We have to know these people. Know their looks and their nature," he reminded himself on June 17. By conceiving the Joads as "an over-essence of people," Steinbeck elevated the entire history of the migrant struggle into the realm of art, and he joined the mythic western journey with latently heroic characters, according to this key notation on June 30: "Yesterday… I went over the whole of the book in my head—fixed on the last scene, huge and symbolic, toward which the whole story moves. And that was a good thing, for it was a reunderstanding of the dignity of the effort and the mightyness of the theme. I feel very small and inadequate and incapable but I grew again to love the story which is so much greater than I am. To love and admire the people who are so much stronger and purer and braver than I am."

At times during that summer, though, his task seemed insurmountable, because he kept losing the "threads" that tied him

to his characters. “Was ever a book written under greater difficulty?” Nearly every day brought unsolicited requests for his name and his time, including unscheduled visitors, unanticipated disruptions, and reversals. Domestic and conjugal relations with Carol were often strained. House guests trooped to Los Gatos all summer, including family members and long-time friends Carlton Sheffield, Ed Ricketts, Ritch and Tal Lovejoy, plus new acquaintances Broderick Crawford, Charlie Chaplin, and Pare Lorentz. As if that weren’t enough to erode the novelist’s composure, the Steinbecks’ tiny house on Greenwood Lane was besieged with the noise of neighborhood building, which nearly drove them to distraction. By midsummer, hoping for permanent sanctuary, they decided to buy the secluded Biddle Ranch, a forty-seven-acre spread on Brush Road in the Santa Cruz Mountains above Los Gatos. Even though it was the most stunning location they had seen, its original homestead was in disrepair, so besides buying the land they would also have to build a new house, and that too became a source of added distractions. The Steinbecks didn’t move in until November 1938, a month after the novel was finished (final typing of the manuscript and corrections of the typescript and galley proofs took place at the Biddle Ranch from November 1938 to early February 1939), but preparations for its purchase ate a great deal of Steinbeck’s time and energy from mid-July onward.

August proved the most embattled period. Early in the month Stein-beck noted in his journal: “There are now four things or five rather to write through—throat, bankruptcy, Pare, ranch, and the book.” His litany of woes included Carol’s tonsil operation, which incapacitated her; the bankruptcy of Steinbeck’s publisher, Covici-Friede, which threatened to end their only source of income and posed an uncertain publishing future for the novel he was writing; Pare Lorentz’s arrangements for making a film version of *In Dubious Battle;* the purchase of the Biddle Ranch, which Carol wanted badly and Steinbeck felt compelled to buy for her (they argued over the pressure this caused); and the book itself, still untitled (and therefore without “being”), which seemed more recalcitrant than ever. By mid-August, roughly halfway through the novel, Steinbeck took stock of his situation: The Viking Press had bought his contract, hired Pat Covici as part of the deal, and planned a first printing of 15,000 copies for Steinbeck’s collection of short stories,

The Long Valley; a string of famous house guests had either just departed or were about to arrive; and he and Carol had closed on the Biddle property for $10,500. “Demoralization complete and seemingly unbeatable. So many things happening that I can’t not be interested…. All this is more excitement than our whole lives put together. All crowded into a month. My many weaknesses are beginning to show their heads. I simply must get this thing out of my system. I’m not a writer. I’ve been fooling myself and other people…. This success will ruin me as sure as hell.” Four days later, on August 20, Lorentz arrived for the weekend. His visit broke Steinbeck’s depression and log jam. Though their film project would fall through, Steinbeck was encouraged by Lorentz’s prescience that his novel would be one of “the greatest novels of the age.” Steinbeck kept up his daily stint (he aimed for 2000 words at each sitting, some days managing as few as 800, some days, when the juices were flowing, as many as 2200) through what Carol agreed were the “interminable details and minor crises” of August and September.

In early October, rebuked often by his wife (Ma Joad’s indomitableness owes as much to Carol’s spirit as it does to his research into Robert Briffault’s anthropological treatise *The Mothers*), Steinbeck roused himself from another bout of “self indulgence” and “laziness” to mount the final drive. Like a gift, the last five chapters of the novel came to him so abundantly that he had more material than he could use. Now the full force of Steinbeck’s experience at Visalia eight months earlier came into play, propelling his metamorphosis from right-minded competency to inspired vision. What Steinbeck had witnessed in that “heartbreaking” sea of mud and debris called forth every ounce of his moral indignation, social anger, and empathy, which in turn profoundly affected his novel’s climax. His internal wounding opened the floodgates of his affection, created *The Grapes of Wrath*’s compelling justification, provided its haunting spiritual urgency, and rooted it in the deepest wellsprings of democratic fellow-feeling. In the same way that rain floods the novel’s concluding chapters, so the memory of Steinbeck’s cataclysmic experience, his compensation for the futility and impotency of Visalia, pervades the ending of the book and charges its ominous emotional climate, relieved only by Rose of Sharon’s gratuitous act of sharing her breast with a starving stranger. “It must be an accident, it must be a

stranger, and it must be quick," Steinbeck instructed Covici. "To build this stranger into the structure of the book would be to warp the whole meaning of the book." This final tableau scene—subversively erotic, mysteriously prophetic, tantalizingly indeterminate—refuses to fade from view; before the apocalypse occurs, before everything is lost in nothingness, Steinbeck suggests, *all* gestures must pass from self to world, from flesh to word, from communication to communion.

Similarly, Steinbeck's deep participation at Visalia empowered his transformation of Tom Joad, the slowly awakening disciple of Jim Casy. Tom's final acceptance of the crucified preacher's gospel of social action occurs just as the deluge is about to begin in Chapter 28:

> Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an'—I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' live in the houses they build—why, I'll be there. See? God, I'm talkin' like Casy. Comes of thinkin' about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes.

Furthermore, in one of those magical transferences artists are heir to in moments of extreme exhaustion or receptivity, Steinbeck believed that his fictive alter ego not only floats above *The Grapes of Wrath*'s "last pages… like a spirit," but he imagined that Joad actually entered the novelist's work space, the private chamber of his room: "'Tom! Tom! Tom!' I know. It wasn't him. Yes, I think I can go on now. In fact, I feel stronger. Much stronger. Funny where the energy comes from. Now to work, only now it isn't work any more," he wrote in *Working Days* on October 20. With that breakthrough, at once a visitation and a benediction, Steinbeck arrived at the intersection of novel and journal, that luminous point, that fifth layer of involvement, where the life of the writer and the creator of life merge. He entered the architecture of his own novel and lived in its fictive space, where, like Tom Joad, Steinbeck discovered that it was no longer necessary to lead people toward a distant new Eden or illusory Promised Land; rather, the most heroic action was simply to learn to be present in the here and now, and to inhabit the "wherever" fully and at once.

The terms of his complex investment fulfilled, Steinbeck needed only a few more days to finish his novel. Around noon on

Wednesday, October 26, 1938, Steinbeck, "so dizzy" he could "hardly see the page," completed the last 775 words of the novel; at the bottom of the concluding manuscript page, Steinbeck, whose writing was normally minuscule, scrawled in letters an inch and a half high, "END#". It should have been cause for wild celebrating, but between bouts of bone-weary tiredness and nervous exhaustion, Steinbeck felt only numbness and perhaps some of the mysterious satisfaction that comes from having transformed the weight of his whole life into the new book. In *The Grapes of Wrath* the multiple streams of subjective experience, ameliorism, graphic realism, biblical themes, and symbolic forms gather to create the "truly American book" Steinbeck had planned. "Finished this day," his simple final journal entry read, "and I hope to God it's good."

IV

In 1963 Steinbeck told Caskie Stinnett: "I wrote *The Grapes of Wrath* in one hundred days, but many years of preparation preceded it. I take a hell of a long time to get started. The actual writing is the last process." Though Steinbeck actually wrote the novel in ninety-three sittings, it was his way of saying that *The Grapes of Wrath* was an intuited whole that embodied the form of his devotion. The entire 200,000-word manuscript took up to 165 handwritten pages (plus one smaller sheet) of a 12" × 18" lined ledger book. When he was hot, Steinbeck wrote fast, paying little or no attention to proper spelling, punctuation, or paragraphing. On top of that his script was so small he was capable of cramming over 1300 words onto a single oversized ledger sheet (the equivalent of four pages of The Viking Press text). In short, the novel was written with remarkably preordained motion and directed passion; British scholar Roy S. Simmonds says it demonstrates a "phenomenal unity of purpose," an example of "spontaneous prose," years before Kerouac's *On the Road*. Except for two brief added passages of 82 and 228 words and a deleted passage of approximately 160 words, the emendations are not major or substantive. Ironically, though Steinbeck severely doubted his own artistic ability, and in fact wavered sometimes in regard to such niceties as chapter divisions (he originally conceived the novel in three major Books), in writing this novel he was creating with the full potency of his imaginative powers. His ability

to execute a work of its magnitude places him among the premiere creative talents of his time. From the vantage point of history, the adventure stands as one of those happy occasions when a writer simply wrote better than he thought he could.

Steinbeck had lost sight of the novel's effectiveness and had little grasp of its potential popularity, so he warned Covici and The Viking Press against a large first printing. Viking ignored him and spent $10,000 on publicity and printed an initial run of 50,000 copies. After recuperating in San Francisco, the Steinbecks moved to their new Brush Road mountain home. It was still under construction, so they camped awhile in the old homestead, where Carol finished typing the 751-page typescript, and together they made "routine" final corrections. At Covici's badgering (he had read 400 pages of the typescript on a visit to Los Gatos in late October), Steinbeck gave in and sent the first two chapters to him on November 29. The whole of Carol's cleanly typed copy, which was actually only the second draft, was sent to his New York agents on December 7, 1938, roughly six months after Steinbeck had started the novel. Elizabeth Otis visited Los Gatos in late December to smooth out some of Steinbeck's rough language, like the dozen or so instances of "fuck," "shit," "screw," and "fat ass," which were the chief offenders. They reached a workable compromise: Steinbeck agreed to change only those words "which Carol and Elizabeth said stopped the reader's mind"; otherwise "those readers who are insulted by normal events or language mean nothing to me," he told Covici on January 3, 1939. The novel's enthusiastic reception at Viking was spoiled by the wrangling that ensued over the controversial Rose of Sharon ending, which the firm wanted Steinbeck to change. On January 16, 1939, he fired back: "I am sorry but I cannot change that ending.… The giving of the breast has no more sentiment than the giving of a piece of bread. I'm sorry if that doesn't get over. It will maybe. I've been on this design and balance for a long time and I think I know how I want it. And if I'm wrong, I'm alone in my wrongness." The entire post-writing flurry, including proofreading the galleys, struck the novelist, by then suffering from sciatica and tonsillitis, as anticlimactic: "I have no interest… whatever now. When the story is told I just can't work up any more interest."

Plenty of other people had interest, though. *The Grapes of Wrath* was widely and favorably reviewed and its fidelity to fact discussed

and debated in the popular press when it was first published. It has been praised by the left as a triumph of proletarian writing, nominated by critics and reviewers alike as "The Great American Novel," given historical vindication by Senator Robert M. La Follette's inquiries into California's tyrannical farm labor conditions, and validated by Carey McWilliams, whose own great work, *Factories in the Fields* (1939), is the classic sociological counterpart to Steinbeck's novel. *The Grapes of Wrath* was defended on several occasions by President and Eleanor Roosevelt for its power, integrity, and accuracy. For instance, after inspecting California migrant camps in 1940, Mrs. Roosevelt said, "I have never thought *The Grapes of Wrath* was exaggerated." (Steinbeck responded gratefully: "I have been called a liar so constantly that… I wonder whether I may not have dreamed the things I saw and heard.")

But *The Grapes of Wrath* has also been attacked by academic scholars as sentimental, unconvincing, and inartistic, banned repeatedly by school boards and libraries for its rebellious theme and frank language, and denounced by right-wing ministers, corporate farmers, and politicians as communist, immoral, degrading, warped, and untruthful. Oklahoma Congressman Lyle Boren, typical of the book's early detractors, called it "a lie, a black, infernal creation of a twisted, distorted mind." A Jesuit priest, Arthur D. Spearman, called it "an embodiment of the Marxist Soviet propaganda." The Associated Farmers mounted a smear campaign to discredit the book and its author. Rebuttals, designed to whitewash the Okie situation, were published by Frank J. Taylor ("California's *Grapes of Wrath*") and by Ruth Comfort Mitchell, Steinbeck's Los Gatos neighbor (*Of Human Kindness*). None of them had one iota of impact.

Since then, of course, *The Grapes of Wrath* has been steadily scrutinized, studied, interrogated, and analyzed by literary critics, scholars, historians, and creative writers. It is no exaggeration to say that, during the past half century, few American novels have attracted such passionate attacks and equally passionate defenses. It seems hard to believe that critics have read the same book. Philip Rahv's complaint in the *Partisan Review* (Spring 1939) that "the novel is far too didactic and long-winded," and "fails on the test of craftsmanship" should be judged against Charles Angoff 's assessment in the *North American Review* (Summer 1939) that it is

"momentous, monumental, and memorable," and an example of "the highest art." This dialectic still characterizes the novel's critical reception. In a 1989speech, the prominent cultural critic Leslie Fiedler attacked the novel as "maudlin, sentimental, and overblown"; another review a month later by Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist William Kennedy praised it for standing "tall… a mighty, mighty book."

The past fifty years have seen little consensus about the exact nature of the novel's achievement, though most contemporary analysts now treat the book as a legitimate work of fiction rather than a propagandistic tract. As a result, there is a great deal of deserving attention to Steinbeck's art and technique. Whether *Grapes* is viewed through a social, historical, linguistic, formal, political, ecological, psychological, mythic, metaphysical, or religious lens (all examples of recent critical methods), the book's textual richness, its many layers of action, language, and character, continue to repay enormous dividends. As scholar John Ditsky observed, "the Joads are still in motion, and their vehicle with them." Intellectual theories to the contrary, reading remains a subjective act, and perhaps the only sure thing about *The Grapes of Wrath* is its capacity to elicit powerful responses from its audience. This of course was Steinbeck's intention from the first. "I don't think *The Grapes of Wrath* is obscure in what it tries to say," he claimed in 1955. "Its structure is very carefully worked out…. Just read it, don't count it!"

As a result of shifting political emphases, the enlightened recommendations of the La Follette Committee (that the National Labor Relations Act include farm workers), the effects of loosened labor laws (California's discriminatory "anti-migrant" law, established in 1901, was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1941), the creation of compulsory military service, and the inevitable recruitment of migrant families into defense plant and shipyard jobs caused by the booming economy of World War II that signaled the beginning of their successful assimilation (California growers soon complained of an acute shortage of seasonal labor), the particular set of epochal conditions that crystallized Steinbeck's awareness in the first place passed from his view. Like other momentous American novels that embody the bitter, often tragic, transition from one way of life to another, *The Grapes of Wrath* possessed, among its other attributes, perfect timing. Its appearance

permanently altered the literary geography of the United States.

It also changed Steinbeck permanently. The effects of writing 260,000 words in a single year "finished" him, he told Lawrence Clark Powell on January 24, 1939. After his long siege with the "Matter of the Migrants" ("I don't know whether there is anything left of me," he confided in October 1939), his "will to death" was so "strengthened" that by the end of the decade he was sick of writing fiction. It was a decision many critics and reviewers held against him for the rest of his life; they wanted him to write *The Grapes of Wrath* over and over again, which he refused to do. "The process of writing a book is the process of outgrowing it," he told Herbert Sturz. "Disciplinary criticism comes too late. You aren't going to write that one again anyway. When you start another—the horizons have receded and you are just as cold and frightened as you were with the first one."

The unabated sales, the frenzied public clamor, and the vicious personal attacks over *The Grapes of Wrath* confirmed his worst fears about the fruits of success and pushed the tensions between the Steinbecks to the breaking point, a situation exacerbated by his willful romance with Gwyn Conger (they were wed from 1943 to 1948; the marriage produced two children) and his repeated absences in Hollywood and Mexico. Steinbeck did not quit writing, as he had threatened, but by the early 1940s he was no longer content to be the man he had once been. His letter of November 13, 1939, to former Stanford roommate Carlton Sheffield pulls no punches: "I'm finishing off a complete revolution…. The point of all this is that I must make a new start. I've worked the novel—I know it as far as I can take it. I never did think much of it—a clumsy vehicle at best. And I don't know the form of the new but I know there is a new which will be adequate and shaped by the new thinking." Steinbeck's change from social realist to meta-fictionist was not caused by a bankruptcy of talent, a change of venue, or a failure of nerve or honesty. Rather, it was the backlash from an unprecedented and unanticipated success, a repugnant "posterity." "I have always wondered why no author has survived a best-seller," he told John Rice in a June 1939 interview. "Now I know. The publicity and fan-fare are just as bad as they would be for a boxer. One gets self-conscious and that's the end of one's writing." His new writing lacked the aggressive bite of his late 1930s fiction, but it had the virtue of being different and varied. After 1940much of his

important work centered on explorations of a newly discovered topic: the implications of individual choice and imaginative consciousness. A prophetic post-modernist, Steinbeck's deep subject in *Sea of Cortez* (1941), *Cannery Row* (1945), *East of Eden* (1954), *Sweet Thursday* (1954), *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), and *Journal of a Novel* (1969) was the creative process itself, the epistemological dance of the law of thought and the law of things.

The Grapes of Wrath is arguably the most significant indictment ever made of the myth of California as a Promised Land. And ironically, as John Steinbeck composed this novel that extolled a social group's capacity for survival in a hostile world, he was himself so unraveled in the process that the angle of vision, the vital signature, the moral indignation that made his art exemplary in the first place, could never be repeated with the same integrated force. Once his name became inseparably linked with the title of his most famous novel, Steinbeck could never escape the influence of his earlier life, but thankfully neither can we. Wherever human beings dream of a dignified and free society in which they can harvest the fruits of their own labor, *The Grapes of Wrath*'s radical voice of protest can still be heard. As a tale of dashed illusions, thwarted desires, inhuman suffering, and betrayed promises—all strung on a shimmering thread of hope—*The Grapes of Wrath* not only summed up the Depression era's socially conscious art but, beyond that—for emotional urgency, evocative power, and sustained drama—has few peers in American fiction.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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A Note on the Text

The text of this edition of *The Grapes of Wrath* is based on the special fiftieth-anniversary edition of the novel, which reproduced the original text published in 1939 by The Viking Press.

The Grapes of Wrath

Chapter 1

To the red country and part of the gray country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth. The plows crossed and recrossed the rivulet marks. The last rains lifted the corn quickly and scattered weed colonies and grass along the sides of the roads so that the gray country and the dark red country began to disappear under a green cover. In the last part of May the sky grew pale and the clouds that had hung in high puffs for so long in the spring were dissipated. The sun flared down on the growing corn day after day until a line of brown spread along the edge of each green bayonet. The clouds appeared, and went away, and in a while they did not try any more. The weeds grew darker green to protect themselves, and they did not spread any more. The surface of the earth crusted, a thin hard crust, and as the sky became pale, so the earth became pale, pink in the red country and white in the gray country.

In the water-cut gullies the earth dusted down in dry little streams. Gophers and ant lions started small avalanches. And as the sharp sun struck day after day, the leaves of the young corn became less stiff and erect; they bent in a curve at first, and then, as the central ribs of strength grew weak, each leaf tilted downward. Then it was June, and the sun shone more fiercely. The brown lines on the corn leaves widened and moved in on the central ribs. The weeds frayed and edged back toward their roots. The air was thin and the sky more pale; and every day the earth paled.

In the roads where the teams moved, where the wheels milled the ground and the hooves of the horses beat the ground, the dirt crust broke and the dust formed. Every moving thing lifted the dust into the air: a walking man lifted a thin layer as high as his waist, and a wagon lifted the dust as high as the fence tops, and an automobile boiled a cloud behind it. The dust was long in settling back again.

When June was half gone, the big clouds moved up out of Texas and the Gulf, high heavy clouds, rain-heads. The men in the fields looked up at the clouds and sniffed at them and held wet fingers up to sense the wind. And the horses were nervous while the clouds were up. The rain-heads dropped a little spattering and hurried on to some other country. Behind them the sky was pale again and the

sun flared. In the dust there were drop craters where the rain had fallen, and there were clean splashes on the corn, and that was all.

A gentle wind followed the rain clouds, driving them on northward, a wind that softly clashed the drying corn. A day went by and the wind increased, steady, unbroken by gusts. The dust from the roads fluffed up and spread out and fell on the weeds beside the fields, and fell into the fields a little way. Now the wind grew strong and hard and it worked at the rain crust in the corn fields. Little by little the sky was darkened by the mixing dust, and the wind felt over the earth, loosened the dust, and carried it away. The wind grew stronger. The rain crust broke and the dust lifted up out of the fields and drove gray plumes into the air like sluggish smoke. The corn threshed the wind and made a dry, rushing sound. The finest dust did not settle back to earth now, but disappeared into the darkening sky.

The wind grew stronger, whisked under stones, carried up straws and old leaves, and even little clods, marking its course as it sailed across the fields. The air and the sky darkened and through them the sun shone redly, and there was a raw sting in the air. During a night the wind raced faster over the land, dug cunningly among the rootlets of the corn, and the corn fought the wind with its weakened leaves until the roots were freed by the prying wind and then each stalk settled wearily sideways toward the earth and pointed the direction of the wind.

The dawn came, but no day. In the gray sky a red sun appeared, a dim red circle that gave a little light, like dusk; and as that day advanced, the dusk slipped back toward darkness, and the wind cried and whimpered over the fallen corn.

Men and women huddled in their houses, and they tied handkerchiefs over their noses when they went out, and wore goggles to protect their eyes.

When the night came again it was black night, for the stars could not pierce the dust to get down, and the window lights could not even spread beyond their own yards. Now the dust was evenly mixed with the air, an emulsion of dust and air. Houses were shut tight, and cloth wedged around doors and windows, but the dust came in so thinly that it could not be seen in the air, and it settled like pollen on the chairs and tables, on the dishes. The people brushed it from their shoulders. Little lines of dust lay at the door

sills.

In the middle of that night the wind passed on and left the land quiet. The dust-filled air muffled sound more completely than fog does. The people, lying in their beds, heard the wind stop. They awakened when the rushing wind was gone. They lay quietly and listened deep into the stillness. Then the roosters crowed, and their voices were muffled, and the people stirred restlessly in their beds and wanted the morning. They knew it would take a long time for the dust to settle out of the air. In the morning the dust hung like fog, and the sun was as red as ripe new blood. All day the dust sifted down from the sky, and the next day it sifted down. An even blanket covered the earth. It settled on the corn, piled up on the tops of the fence posts, piled up on the wires; it settled on roofs, blanketed the weeds and trees.

The people came out of their houses and smelled the hot stinging air and covered their noses from it. And the children came out of the houses, but they did not run or shout as they would have done after a rain. Men stood by their fences and looked at the ruined corn, drying fast now, only a little green showing through the film of dust. The men were silent and they did not move often. And the women came out of the houses to stand beside their men—to feel whether this time the men would break. The women studied the men's faces secretly, for the corn could go, as long as something else remained. The children stood near by, drawing figures in the dust with bare toes, and the children sent exploring senses out to see whether men and women would break. The children peeked at the faces of the men and women, and then drew careful lines in the dust with their toes. Horses came to the watering troughs and nuzzled the water to clear the surface dust. After a while the faces of the watching men lost their bemused perplexity and became hard and angry and resistant. Then the women knew that they were safe and that there was no break. Then they asked, What'll we do? And the men replied, I don't know. But it was all right. The women knew it was all right, and the watching children knew it was all right. Women and children knew deep in themselves that no misfortune was too great to bear if their men were whole. The women went into the houses to their work, and the children began to play, but cautiously at first. As the day went forward the sun became less red. It flared down on the dust-blanketed land. The men sat in the doorways of their houses; their hands were busy with

sticks and little rocks. The men sat still—thinking—figuring.

Chapter 2

A huge red transport truck stood in front of the little roadside restaurant. The vertical exhaust pipe muttered softly, and an almost invisible haze of steel-blue smoke hovered over its end. It was a new truck, shining red, and in twelve-inch letters on its sides—OKLAHOMA CITY TRANSPORT COMPANY. Its double tires were new, and a brass padlock stood straight out from the hasp on the big back doors. Inside the screened restaurant a radio played, quiet dance music turned low the way it is when no one is listening. A small outlet fan turned silently in its circular hole over the entrance, and flies buzzed excitedly about the doors and windows, butting the screens. Inside, one man, the truck driver, sat on a stool and rested his elbows on the counter and looked over his coffee at the lean and lonely waitress. He talked the smart listless language of the roadsides to her. "I seen him about three months ago. He had a operation. Cut somepin out. I forget what." And she—"Doesn't seem no longer ago than a week I seen him myself. Looked fine then. He's a nice sort of a guy when he ain't stinko." Now and then the flies roared softly at the screen door. The coffee machine spurted steam, and the waitress, without looking, reached behind her and shut it off.

Outside, a man walking along the edge of the highway crossed over and approached the truck. He walked slowly to the front of it, put his hand on the shiny fender, and looked at the *No Riders* sticker on the windshield. For a moment he was about to walk on down the road, but instead he sat on the running board on the side away from the restaurant. He was not over thirty. His eyes were very dark brown and there was a hint of brown pigment in his eyeballs. His cheek bones were high and wide, and strong deep lines cut down his cheeks, in curves beside his mouth. His upper lip was long, and since his teeth protruded, the lips stretched to cover them, for this man kept his lips closed. His hands were hard, with broad fingers and nails as thick and ridged as little clam shells. The space between thumb and forefinger and the hams of his hands were shiny with callus.

The man's clothes were new—all of them, cheap and new. His gray cap was so new that the visor was still stiff and the button still

on, not shapeless and bulged as it would be when it had served for a while all the various purposes of a cap—carrying sack, towel, handkerchief. His suit was of cheap gray hardcloth and so new that there were creases in the trousers. His blue chambray shirt was stiff and smooth with filler. The coat was too big, the trousers too short, for he was a tall man. The coat shoulder peaks hung down on his arms, and even then the sleeves were too short and the front of the coat flapped loosely over his stomach. He wore a pair of new tan shoes of the kind called "army last," hob-nailed and with half-circles like horseshoes to protect the edges of the heels from wear. This man sat on the running board and took off his cap and mopped his face with it. Then he put on the cap, and by pulling started the future ruin of the visor. His feet caught his attention. He leaned down and loosened the shoelaces, and did not tie the ends again. Over his head the exhaust of the Diesel engine whispered in quick puffs of blue smoke.

The music stopped in the restaurant and a man's voice spoke from the loudspeaker, but the waitress did not turn him off, for she didn't know the music had stopped. Her exploring fingers had found a lump under her ear. She was trying to see it in a mirror behind the counter without letting the truck driver know, and so she pretended to push a bit of hair to neatness. The truck driver said, "They was a big dance in Shawnee. I heard somebody got killed or some-pin. You hear anything?" "No," said the waitress, and she lovingly fingered the lump under her ear.

Outside, the seated man stood up and looked over the cowl of the truck and watched the restaurant for a moment. Then he settled back on the running board, pulled a sack of tobacco and a book of papers from his side pocket. He rolled his cigarette slowly and perfectly, studied it, smoothed it. At last he lighted it and pushed the burning match into the dust at his feet. The sun cut into the shade of the truck as noon approached.

In the restaurant the truck driver paid his bill and put his two nickels' change in a slot machine. The whirling cylinders gave him no score. "They fix 'em so you can't win nothing," he said to the waitress.

And she replied, "Guy took the jackpot not two hours ago. Three-eighty he got. How soon you gonna be back by?"

He held the screen door a little open. "Week-ten days," he said.

“Got to make a run to Tulsa, an’ I never get back soon as I think.”

She said crossly, “Don’t let the flies in. Either go out or come in.”

“So long,” he said, and pushed his way out. The screen door banged behind him. He stood in the sun, peeling the wrapper from a piece of gum. He was a heavy man, broad in the shoulders, thick in the stomach. His face was red and his blue eyes long and slitted from having squinted always at sharp light. He wore army trousers and high laced boots. Holding the stick of gum in front of his lips he called through the screen, “Well, don’t do nothing you don’t want me to hear about.” The waitress was turned toward a mirror on the back wall. She grunted a reply. The truck driver gnawed down the stick of gum slowly, opening his jaws and lips wide with each bite. He shaped the gum in his mouth, rolled it under his tongue while he walked to the big red truck.

The hitch-hiker stood up and looked across through the windows. “Could ya give me a lift, mister?”

The driver looked quickly back at the restaurant for a second. “Didn’ you see the *No Riders* sticker on the win’ shield?”

“Sure—I seen it. But sometimes a guy’ll be a good guy even if some rich bastard makes him carry a sticker.”

The driver, getting slowly into the truck, considered the parts of this answer. If he refused now, not only was he not a good guy, but he was forced to carry a sticker, was not allowed to have company. If he took in the hitch-hiker he was automatically a good guy and also he was not one whom any rich bastard could kick around. He knew he was being trapped, but he couldn’t see a way out. And he wanted to be a good guy. He glanced again at the restaurant. “Scrunch down on the running board till we get around the bend,” he said.

The hitch-hiker flopped down out of sight and clung to the door handle. The motor roared up for a moment, the gears clicked in, and the great truck moved away, first gear, second gear, third gear, and then a high whining pick-up and fourth gear. Under the clinging man the highway blurred dizzily by. It was a mile to the first turn in the road, then the truck slowed down. The hitch-hiker stood up, eased the door open, and slipped into the seat. The driver looked over at him, slitting his eyes, and he chewed as though thoughts and impressions were being sorted and arranged by his jaws before they were finally filed away in his brain. His eyes began

at the new cap, moved down the new clothes to the new shoes. The hitch-hiker squirmed his back against the seat in comfort, took off his cap, and swabbed his sweating forehead and chin with it. “Thanks, buddy,” he said. “My dogs was pooped out.”

“New shoes,” said the driver. His voice had the same quality of secrecy and insinuation his eyes had. “You oughtn’ to take no walk in new shoes—hot weather.”

The hiker looked down at the dusty yellow shoes. “Didn’t have no other shoes,” he said. “Guy got to wear ’em if he got no others.”

The driver squinted judiciously ahead and built up the speed of the truck a little. “Goin’ far?”

“Uh-uh! I’d a walked her if my dogs wasn’t pooped out.”

The questions of the driver had the tone of a subtle examination. He seemed to spread nets, to set traps with his questions. “Lookin’ for a job?” he asked.

“No, my old man got a place, forty acres. He’s a cropper, but we been there a long time.”

The driver looked significantly at the fields along the road where the corn was fallen sideways and the dust was piled on it. Little flints shoved through the dusty soil. The driver said, as though to himself, “A forty-acre cropper and he ain’t been dusted out and he ain’t been tractored out?”

“’Course I ain’t heard lately,” said the hitch-hiker.

“Long time,” said the driver. A bee flew into the cab and buzzed in back of the windshield. The driver put out his hand and carefully drove the bee into an air stream that blew it out of the window. “Croppers going fast now,” he said. “One cat’ takes and shoves ten families out. Cat’s all over hell now. Tear in and shove the croppers out. How’s your old man hold on?” His tongue and his jaws became busy with the neglected gum, turned it and chewed it. With each opening of his mouth his tongue could be seen flipping the gum over.

“Well, I ain’t heard lately. I never was no hand to write, nor my old man neither.” He added quickly, “But the both of us can, if we want.”

“Been doing a job?” Again the secret investigating casualness. He looked out over the fields, at the shimmering air, and gathering his gum into his cheek, out of the way, he spat out the window.

“Sure have,” said the hitch-hiker.

“Thought so. I seen your hands. Been swingin’ a pick or an ax or a sledge. That shines up your hands. I notice all stuff like that. Take a pride in it.”

The hitch-hiker stared at him. The truck tires sang on the road. “Like to know anything else? I’ll tell you. You ain’t got to guess.”

“Now don’t get sore. I wasn’t gettin’ nosy.”

“I’ll tell you anything. I ain’t hidin’ nothin’.”

“Now don’t get sore. I just like to notice things. Makes the time pass.”

“I’ll tell you anything. Name’s Joad, Tom Joad. Old man is ol’ Tom Joad.” His eyes rested broodingly on the driver.

“Don’t get sore. I didn’t mean nothin’.”

“I don’t mean nothin’ neither,” said Joad. “I’m just tryin’ to get along without shovin’ nobody around.” He stopped and looked out at the dry fields, at the starved tree clumps hanging uneasily in the heated distance. From his side pocket he brought out his tobacco and papers. He rolled his cigarette down between his knees, where the wind could not get at it.

The driver chewed as rhythmically, as thoughtfully, as a cow. He waited to let the whole emphasis of the preceding passage disappear and be forgotten. At last, when the air seemed neutral again, he said, “A guy that never been a truck skinner don’t know nothin’ what it’s like. Owners don’t want us to pick up nobody. So we got to set here an’ just skin her along ’less we want to take a chance of gettin’fired like I just done with you.”

“’Preciate it,” said Joad.

“I’ve knew guys that done screwy things while they’re drivin’ trucks. I remember a guy use’ to make up poetry. It passed the time.” He looked over secretly to see whether Joad was interested or amazed. Joad was silent, looking into the distance ahead, along the road, along the white road that waved gently, like a ground swell. The driver went on at last, “I remember a piece of poetry this here guy wrote down. It was about him an’ a couple other guys goin’ all over the world drinkin’ and raisin’ hell and screwin’ around. I wisht I could remember how that piece went. This guy had words in it that Jesus H. Christ wouldn’t know what they meant. Part was like this: ‘An’ there we spied a nigger, with a

trigger that was bigger than a elephant's proboscis or the whanger of a whale.' That proboscis is a nose-like. With a elephant it's his trunk. Guy showed me in a dictionary. Carried that dictionary all over hell with him. He'd look in it while he's pulled up gettin' his pie an' coffee." He stopped, feeling lonely in the long speech. His secret eyes turned on his passenger. Joad remained silent. Nervously the driver tried to force him into participation. "Ever know a guy that said big words like that?"

"Preacher," said Joad.

"Well, it makes you mad to hear a guy use big words. 'Course with a preacher it's all right because nobody would fool around with a preacher anyway. But this guy was funny. You didn't give a damn when he said a big word 'cause he just done it for ducks. He wasn't puttin' on no dog." The driver was reassured. He knew at least that Joad was listening. He swung the great truck viciously around a bend and the tires shrilled. "Like I was sayin'," he continued, "guy that drives a truck does screwy things. He got to. He'd go nuts just settin' here an' the road sneakin' under the wheels. Fella says once that truck skinners eats all the time—all the time in hamburger joints along the road."

"Sure seem to live there," Joad agreed.

"Sure they stop, but it ain't to eat. They ain't hardly ever hungry. They're just goddamn sick of goin'—get sick of it. Joints is the only place you can pull up, an' when you stop you got to buy somepin so you can sling the bull with the broad behind the counter. So you get a cup a coffee and a piece pie. Kind of gives a guy a little rest." He chewed his gum slowly and turned it with his tongue.

"Must be tough," said Joad with no emphasis.

The driver glanced quickly at him, looking for satire. "Well, it ain't no goddamn cinch," he said testily. "Looks easy, jus' settin' here till you put in your eight or maybe your ten or fourteen hours. But the road gets into a guy. He's got to do somepin. Some sings an' some whistles. Company won't let us have no radio. A few takes a pint along, but them kind don't stick long." He said the last smugly. "I don't never take a drink till I'm through."

"Yeah?" Joad asked.

"Yeah! A guy got to get ahead. Why, I'm thinkin' of takin' one of them correspondence school courses. Mechanical engineering. It's easy. Just study a few easy lessons at home. I'm thinkin' of it. Then

I won't drive no truck. Then I'll tell other guys to drive trucks."

Joad took a pint of whisky from his side coat pocket. "Sure you won't have a snort?" His voice was teasing.

"No, by God. I won't touch it. A guy can't drink liquor all the time and study like I'm goin' to."

Joad uncorked the bottle, took two quick swallows, recorked it, and put it back in his pocket. The spicy hot smell of the whisky filled the cab. "You're all wound up," said Joad. "What's the matter —got a girl?"

"Well, sure. But I want to get ahead anyway. I been training my mind for a hell of a long time."

The whisky seemed to loosen Joad up. He rolled another cigarette and lighted it. "I ain't got a hell of a lot further to go," he said.

The driver went on quickly, "I don't need no shot," he said. "I train my mind all the time. I took a course in that two years ago." He patted the steering wheel with his right hand. "Suppose I pass a guy on the road. I look at him, an' after I'm past I try to remember ever'thing about him, kind a clothes an' shoes an' hat, an' how he walked an' maybe how tall an' what weight an' any scars. I do it pretty good. I can jus' make a whole picture in my head. Sometimes I think I ought to take a course to be a fingerprint expert. You'd be su'prised how much a guy can remember."

Joad took a quick drink from the flask. He dragged the last smoke from his raveling cigarette and then, with callused thumb and forefinger, crushed out the glowing end. He rubbed the butt to a pulp and put it out the window, letting the breeze suck it from his fingers. The big tires sang a high note on the pavement. Joad's dark quiet eyes became amused as he stared along the road. The driver waited and glanced uneasily over. At last Joad's long upper lip grinned up from his teeth and he chuckled silently, his chest jerked with the chuckles. "You sure took a hell of a long time to get to it, buddy."

The driver did not look over. "Get to what? How do you mean?"

Joad's lips stretched tight over his long teeth for a moment, and he licked his lips like a dog, two licks, one in each direction from the middle. His voice became harsh. "You know what I mean. You give me a goin'-over when I first got in. I seen you." The driver looked straight ahead, gripped the wheel so tightly that the pads of

his palms bulged, and the backs of his hands paled. Joad continued, "You know where I come from." The driver was silent. "Don't you?" Joad insisted.

"Well—sure. That is—maybe. But it ain't none of my business. I mind my own yard. It ain't nothing to me." The words tumbled out now. "I don't stick my nose in nobody's business." And suddenly he was silent and waiting. And his hands were still white on the wheel. A grasshopper flipped through the window and lighted on top of the instrument panel, where it sat and began to scrape its wings with its angled jumping legs. Joad reached forward and crushed its hard skull-like head with his fingers, and he let it into the wind stream out the window. Joad chuckled again while he brushed the bits of broken insect from his fingertips. "You got me wrong, mister," he said. "I ain't keepin' quiet about it. Sure I been in McAlester. Been there four years. Sure these is the clothes they give me when I come out. I don't give a damn who knows it. An' I'm goin' to my old man's place so I don't have to lie to get a job."

The driver said, "Well—that ain't none of my business. I ain't a nosy guy."

"The hell you ain't," said Joad. "That big old nose of yours been stickin' out eight miles ahead of your face. You had that big nose goin' over me like a sheep in a vegetable patch."

The driver's face tightened. "You got me all wrong—" he began weakly.

Joad laughed at him. "You been a good guy. You give me a lift. Well, hell! I done time. So what! You want to know what I done time for, don't you?"

"That ain't none of my affair."

"Nothin' ain't none of your affair except skinnin' this here bull-bitch along, an' that's the least thing you work at. Now look. See that road up ahead?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I get off there. Sure, I know you're wettin' your pants to know what I done. I ain't a guy to let you down." The high hum of the motor dulled and the song of the tires dropped in pitch. Joad got out his pint and took another short drink. The truck drifted to a stop where a dirt road opened at right angles to the highway. Joad got out and stood beside the cab window. The vertical exhaust pipe

puttered up its barely visible blue smoke. Joad leaned toward the driver. “Homicide,” he said quickly. “That’s a big word—means I killed a guy. Seven years. I’m sprung in four for keepin’ my nose clean.”

The driver’s eyes slipped over Joad’s face to memorize it. “I never asked you nothin’ about it,” he said. “I mind my own yard.”

“You can tell about it in every joint from here to Texola.” He smiled. “So long, fella. You been a good guy. But look, when you been in stir a little while, you can smell a question comin’ from hell to breakfast. You telegraphed yours the first time you opened your trap.” He spatted the metal door with the palm of his hand. “Thanks for the lift,” he said. “So long.” He turned away and walked into the dirt road.

For a moment the driver stared after him, and then he called, “Luck!” Joad waved his hand without looking around. Then the motor roared up and the gears clicked and the great red truck rolled heavily away.

Chapter 3

The concrete highway was edged with a mat of tangled, broken, dry grass, and the grass heads were heavy with oat beards to catch on a dog's coat, and foxtails to tangle in a horse's fetlocks, and clover burrs to fasten in sheep's wool; sleeping life waiting to be spread and dispersed, every seed armed with an appliance of dispersal, twisting darts and parachutes for the wind, little spears and balls of tiny thorns, and all waiting for animals and for the wind, for a man's trouser cuff or the hem of a woman's skirt, all passive but armed with appliances of activity, still, but each possessed of the anlage of movement.

The sun lay on the grass and warmed it, and in the shade under the grass the insects moved, ants and ant lions to set traps for them, grasshoppers to jump into the air and flick their yellow wings for a second, sow bugs like little armadillos, plodding restlessly on many tender feet. And over the grass at the roadside a land turtle crawled, turning aside for nothing, dragging his high-domed shell over the grass. His hard legs and yellow-nailed feet threshed slowly through the grass, not really walking, but boosting and dragging his shell along. The barley beards slid off his shell, and the clover burrs fell on him and rolled to the ground. His horny beak was partly open, and his fierce, humorous eyes, under brows like fingernails, stared straight ahead. He came over the grass leaving a beaten trail behind him, and the hill, which was the highway embankment, reared up ahead of him. For a moment he stopped, his head held high. He blinked and looked up and down. At last he started to climb the embankment. Front clawed feet reached forward but did not touch. The hind feet kicked his shell along, and it scraped on the grass, and on the gravel. As the embankment grew steeper and steeper, the more frantic were the efforts of the land turtle. Pushing hind legs strained and slipped, boosting the shell along, and the horny head protruded as far as the neck could stretch. Little by little the shell slid up the embankment until at last a parapet cut straight across its line of march, the shoulder of the road, a concrete wall four inches high. As though they worked independently the hind legs pushed the shell against the wall. The head upraised and peered over the wall to the broad smooth plain of cement. Now the hands, braced on top of the wall, strained and lifted, and the shell

came slowly up and rested its front end on the wall. For a moment the turtle rested. A red ant ran into the shell, into the soft skin inside the shell, and suddenly head and legs snapped in, and the armored tail clamped in sideways. The red ant was crushed between body and legs. And one head of wild oats was clamped into the shell by a front leg. For a long moment the turtle lay still, and then the neck crept out and the old humorous frowning eyes looked about and the legs and tail came out. The back legs went to work, straining like elephant legs, and the shell tipped to an angle so that the front legs could not reach the level cement plain. But higher and higher the hind legs boosted it, until at last the center of balance was reached, the front tipped down, the front legs scratched at the pavement, and it was up. But the head of wild oats was held by its stem around the front legs.

Now the going was easy, and all the legs worked, and the shell boosted along, waggling from side to side. A sedan driven by a forty-year old woman approached. She saw the turtle and swung to the right, off the highway, the wheels screamed and a cloud of dust boiled up. Two wheels lifted for a moment and then settled. The car skidded back onto the road, and went on, but more slowly. The turtle had jerked into its shell, but now it hurried on, for the highway was burning hot.

And now a light truck approached, and as it came near, the driver saw the turtle and swerved to hit it. His front wheel struck the edge of the shell, flipped the turtle like a tiddly-wink, spun it like a coin, and rolled it off the highway. The truck went back to its course along the right side. Lying on its back, the turtle was tight in its shell for a long time. But at last its legs waved in the air, reaching for something to pull it over. Its front foot caught a piece of quartz and little by little the shell pulled over and flopped upright. The wild oat head fell out and three of the spearhead seeds stuck in the ground. And as the turtle crawled on down the embankment, its shell dragged dirt over the seeds. The turtle entered a dust road and jerked itself along, drawing a wavy shallow trench in the dust with its shell. The old humorous eyes looked ahead, and the horny beak opened a little. His yellow toe nails slipped a fraction in the dust.

Chapter 4

When Joad heard the truck get under way, gear climbing up to gear and the ground throbbing under the rubber beating of the tires, he stopped and turned about and watched it until it disappeared. When it was out of sight he still watched the distance and the blue air-shimmer. Thoughtfully he took the pint from his pocket, unscrewed the metal cap, and sipped the whisky delicately, running his tongue inside the bottle neck, and then around his lips, to gather in any flavor that might have escaped him. He said experimentally, "There we spied a nigger —" and that was all he could remember. At last he turned about and faced the dusty side road that cut off at right angles through the fields. The sun was hot, and no wind stirred the sifted dust. The road was cut with furrows where dust had slid and settled back into the wheel tracks. Joad took a few steps, and the flourlike dust spurted up in front of his new yellow shoes, and the yellowness was disappearing under gray dust.

He leaned down and untied the laces, slipped off first one shoe and then the other. And he worked his damp feet comfortably in the hot dry dust until little spurts of it came up between his toes, and until the skin on his feet tightened with dryness. He took off his coat and wrapped his shoes in it and slipped the bundle under his arm. And at last he moved up the road, shooting the dust ahead of him, making a cloud that hung low to the ground behind him.

The right of way was fenced, two strands of barbed wire on willow poles. The poles were crooked and badly trimmed. Whenever a crotch came to the proper height the wire lay in it, and where there was no crotch the barbed wire was lashed to the post with rusty baling wire. Beyond the fence, the corn lay beaten down by wind and heat and drought, and the cups where leaf joined stalk were filled with dust.

Joad plodded along, dragging his cloud of dust behind him. A little bit ahead he saw the high-domed shell of a land turtle, crawling slowly along through the dust, its legs working stiffly and jerkily. Joad stopped to watch it, and his shadow fell on the turtle. Instantly head and legs were withdrawn and the short thick tail clamped sideways into the shell. Joad picked it up and turned it over. The back was brown-gray, like the dust, but the underside of

the shell was creamy yellow, clean and smooth. Joad shifted his bundle high under his arm and stroked the smooth undershell with his finger, and he pressed it. It was softer than the back. The hard old head came out and tried to look at the pressing finger, and the legs waved wildly. The turtle wetted on Joad's hand and struggled uselessly in the air. Joad turned it back upright and rolled it up in his coat with his shoes. He could feel it pressing and struggling and fussing under his arm. He moved ahead more quickly now, dragging his heels a little in the fine dust.

Ahead of him, beside the road, a scrawny, dusty willow tree cast a speckled shade. Joad could see it ahead of him, its poor branches curving over the way, its load of leaves tattered and scraggly as a molting chicken. Joad was sweating now. His blue shirt darkened down his back and under his arms. He pulled at the visor of his cap and creased it in the middle, breaking its cardboard lining so completely that it could never look new again. And his steps took on new speed and intent toward the shade of the distant willow tree. At the willow he knew there would be shade, at least one hard bar of absolute shade thrown by the trunk, since the sun had passed its zenith. The sun whipped the back of his neck now and made a little humming in his head. He could not see the base of the tree, for it grew out of a little swale that held water longer than the level places. Joad speeded his pace against the sun, and he started down the declivity. He slowed cautiously, for the bar of absolute shade was taken. A man sat on the ground, leaning against the trunk of the tree. His legs were crossed and one bare foot extended nearly as high as his head. He did not hear Joad approaching, for he was whistling solemnly the tune of "Yes, Sir, That's My Baby." His extended foot swung slowly up and down in the tempo. It was not dance tempo. He stopped whistling and sang in an easy thin tenor:

"Yes, sir, that's my Saviour,
Je—sus is my Saviour,
Je—sus is my Saviour now.
On the level
'S not the devil,
Jesus is my Saviour now."

Joad had moved into the imperfect shade of the molting leaves before the man heard him coming, stopped his song, and turned his head. It was a long head, bony, tight of skin, and set on a neck as

stringy and muscular as a celery stalk. His eyeballs were heavy and protruding; the lids stretched to cover them, and the lids were raw and red. His cheeks were brown and shiny and hairless and his mouth full—humorous or sensual. The nose, beaked and hard, stretched the skin so tightly that the bridge showed white. There was no perspiration on the face, not even on the tall pale forehead. It was an abnormally high forehead, lined with delicate blue veins at the temples. Fully half of the face was above the eyes. His stiff gray hair was mussed back from his brow as though he had combed it back with his fingers. For clothes he wore overalls and a blue shirt. A denim coat with brass buttons and a spotted brown hat creased like a pork pie lay on the ground beside him. Canvas sneakers, gray with dust, lay near by where they had fallen when they were kicked off.

The man looked long at Joad. The light seemed to go far into his brown eyes, and it picked out little golden specks deep in the irises. The strained bundle of neck muscles stood out.

Joad stood still in the speckled shade. He took off his cap and mopped his wet face with it and dropped it and his rolled coat on the ground.

The man in the absolute shade uncrossed his legs and dug with his toes at the earth.

Joad said, “Hi. It’s hotter’n hell on the road.”

The seated man stared questioningly at him. “Now ain’t you young Tom Joad—ol’ Tom’s boy?”

“Yeah,” said Joad. “All the way. Goin’ home now.”

“You wouldn’ remember me, I guess,” the man said. He smiled and his full lips revealed great horse teeth. “Oh, no, you wouldn’t remember. You was always too busy pullin’ little girls’ pigtails when I give you the Holy Sperit. You was all wropped up in yankin’ that pigtail out by the roots. You maybe don’t recollect, but I do. The two of you come to Jesus at once ’cause of that pigtail yankin’. Baptized both of you in the irrigation ditch at once. Fightin’ an’ yellin’ like a couple a cats.”

Joad looked at him with drooped eyes, and then he laughed. “Why, you’re the preacher. You’re the preacher. I jus’ passed a recollection about you to a guy not an hour ago.”

“I was a preacher,” said the man seriously. “Reverend Jim Casy—

was a Burning Busher. Used to howl out the name of Jesus to glory. And used to get an irrigation ditch so squirmin' full of repented sinners half of 'em like to drownded. But not no more," he sighed. "Just Jim Casy now. Ain't got the call no more. Got a lot of sinful idears—but they seem kinda sensible."

Joad said, "You're bound to get idears if you go thinkin' about stuff. Sure I remember you. You use ta give a good meetin'. I recollect one time you give a whole sermon walkin' around on your hands, yellin' your head off. Ma favored you more than anybody. An' Granma says you was just lousy with the spirit." Joad dug at his rolled coat and found the pocket and brought out his pint. The turtle moved a leg but he wrapped it up tightly. He unscrewed the cap and held out the bottle. "Have a little snort?"

Casy took the bottle and regarded it broodingly. "I ain't preachin' no more much. The sperit ain't in the people much no more; and worse'n that, the sperit ain't in me no more. 'Course now an' again the sperit gets movin' an' I rip out a meetin', or when folks sets out food I give 'em a grace, but my heart ain't in it. I on'y do it 'cause they expect it."

Joad mopped his face with his cap again. "You ain't too damn holy to take a drink, are you?" he asked.

Casy seemed to see the bottle for the first time. He tilted it and took three big swallows. "Nice drinkin' liquor," he said.

"Ought to be," said Joad. "That's fact'ry liquor. Cost a buck."

Casy took another swallow before he passed the bottle back. "Yes, sir!" he said. "Yes, sir!"

Joad took the bottle from him, and in politeness did not wipe the neck with his sleeve before he drank. He squatted on his hams and set the bottle upright against his coat roll. His fingers found a twig with which to draw his thoughts on the ground. He swept the leaves from a square and smoothed the dust. And he drew angles and made little circles. "I ain't seen you in a long time," he said.

"Nobody seen me," said the preacher. "I went off alone, an' I sat and figured. The sperit's strong in me, on'y it ain't the same. I ain't so sure of a lot of things." He sat up straighter against the tree. His bony hand dug its way like a squirrel into his overall pocket, brought out a black, bitten plug of tobacco. Carefully he brushed off bits of straw and gray pocket fuzz before he bit off a corner and settled the quid into his cheek. Joad waved his stick in negation

when the plug was held out to him. The turtle dug at the rolled coat. Casy looked over at the stirring garment. “What you got there —a chicken? You’ll smother it.”

Joad rolled the coat up more tightly. “An old turtle,” he said. “Picked him up on the road. An old bulldozer. Thought I’d take ’im to my little brother. Kids like turtles.”

The preacher nodded his head slowly. “Every kid got a turtle some time or other. Nobody can’t keep a turtle though. They work at it and work at it, and at last one day they get out and away they go—off somewheres. It’s like me. I wouldn’ take the good ol’ gospel that was just layin’ there to my hand. I got to be pickin’ at it an’ workin’ at it until I got it all tore down. Here I got the sperit sometimes an’ nothin’ to preach about. I got the call to lead the people, an’ no place to lead ’em.”

“Lead ’em around and around,” said Joad. “Sling ’em in the irrigation ditch. Tell ’em they’ll burn in hell if they don’t think like you. What the hell you want to lead ’em someplace for? Jus’ lead ’em.” The straight trunk shade had stretched out along the ground. Joad moved gratefully into it and squatted on his hams and made a new smooth place on which to draw his thoughts with a stick. A thick-furred yellow shepherd dog came trotting down the road, head low, tongue lolling and dripping. Its tail hung limply curled, and it panted loudly. Joad whistled at it, but it only dropped its head an inch and trotted fast toward some definite destination. “Goin’ someplace,” Joad explained, a little piqued. “Goin’ for home maybe.”

The preacher could not be thrown from his subject. “Goin’ someplace,” he repeated. “That’s right, he’s goin’ someplace. Me—I don’t know where I’m goin’. Tell you what—I use ta get the people jumpin’ an’ talkin’ in tongues, an’ glory-shoutin’ till they just fell down an’ passed out. An’ some I’d baptize to bring ’em to. An’ then —you know what I’d do? I’d take one of them girls out in the grass, an’ I’d lay with her. Done it ever’ time. Then I’d feel bad, an’ I’d pray an’ pray, but it didn’t do no good. Come the nex’ time, them an’ me was full of the sperit, I’d do it again. I figgered there just wasn’t no hope for me, an’ I was a damned ol’ hypocrite. But I didn’t mean to be.”

Joad smiled and his long teeth parted and he licked his lips. “There ain’t nothing like a good hot meetin’ for pushin”em over,”

he said. “I done that myself.”

Casy leaned forward excitedly. “You see,” he cried, “I seen it was that way, an’ I started thinkin’.” He waved his bony big-knuckled hand up and down in a patting gesture. “I got to thinkin’ like this —‘Here’s me preachin’ grace. An’ here’s them people gettin’ grace so hard they’re jumpin’ an’ shoutin’. Now they say layin’ up with a girl comes from the devil. But the more grace a girl got in her, the quicker she wants to go out in the grass.’ An’ I got to thinkin’ how in hell, s’cuse me, how can the devil get in when a girl is so full of the Holy Sperit that it’s spoutin’ out of her nose an’ ears. You’d think that’d be one time when the devil didn’t stand a snowball’s chance in hell. But there it was.” His eyes were shining with excitement. He worked his cheeks for a moment and then spat into the dust, and the gob of spit rolled over and over, picking up dust until it looked like a round dry little pellet. The preacher spread out his hand and looked at his palm as though he were reading a book. “An’ there’s me,” he went on softly. “There’s me with all them people’s souls in my han’—responsible an’ feelin’ my responsibility —an’ ever’ time, I lay with one of them girls.” He looked over at Joad and his face looked helpless. His expression asked for help.

Joad carefully drew the torso of a woman in the dirt, breasts, hips, pelvis. “I wasn’t never a preacher,” he said. “I never let nothin’ get by when I could catch it. An’ I never had no idears about it except I was goddamn glad when I got one.”

“But you wasn’t a preacher,” Casy insisted. “A girl was just a girl to you. They wasn’t nothin’ to you. But to me they was holy vessels. I was savin’ their souls. An’ here with all that responsibility on me I’d just get ’em frothin’ with the Holy Sperit, an’ then I’d take ’em out in the grass.”

“Maybe I should of been a preacher,” said Joad. He brought out his tobacco and papers and rolled a cigarette. He lighted it and squinted through the smoke at the preacher. “I been a long time without a girl,” he said. “It’s gonna take some catchin’ up.”

Casy continued, “It worried me till I couldn’t get no sleep. Here I’d go to preachin’ and I’d say, ‘By God, this time I ain’t gonna do it.’ And right while I said it, I knowed I was.”

“You should a got a wife,” said Joad. “Preacher an’ his wife stayed at our place one time. Jehovites they was. Slep’ upstairs. Held meetin’s in our barnyard. Us kids would listen. That preacher’s

missus took a godawful poundin' after ever' night meetin'."

"I'm glad you tol' me," said Casy. "I use to think it was jus' me. Finally it give me such pain I quit an' went off by myself an' give her a damn good thinkin' about." He doubled up his legs and scratched between his dry dusty toes. "I says to myself, 'What's gnawin' you? Is it the screwin'?' An' I says, 'No, it's the sin.' An' I says, 'Why is it that when a fella ought to be just about mule-ass proof against sin, an' all full up of Jesus, why is it that's the time a fella gets fingerin' his pants buttons?'" He laid two fingers down in his palm in rhythm, as though he gently placed each word there side by side. "I says, 'Maybe it ain't a sin. Maybe it's just the way folks is. Maybe we been whippin' the hell out of ourselves for nothin'.' An' I thought how some sisters took to beatin' theirselves with a three-foot shag of bobwire. An' I thought how maybe they liked to hurt themselves, an' maybe I liked to hurt myself. Well, I was layin' under a tree when I figured that out, and I went to sleep. And it come night, an' it was dark when I come to. They was a coyote squawkin' near by. Before I knowed it, I was sayin' out loud. 'The hell with it! There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing. And some of the things folks do is nice, and some ain't nice, but that's as far as any man got a right to say.'" He paused and looked up from the palm of his hand, where he had laid down the words.

Joad was grinning at him, but Joad's eyes were sharp and interested, too. "You give her a goin'-over," he said. "You figured her out."

Casy spoke again, and his voice rang with pain and confusion. "I says, 'What's this call, this sperit?' An' I says, 'It's love. I love people so much I'm fit to bust, sometimes.' An' I says, 'Don't you love Jesus?' Well, I thought an' thought, an'finally I says, 'No, I don't know nobody name' Jesus. I know a bunch of stories, but I only love people. An' sometimes I love 'em fit to bust, an' I want to make 'em happy, so I been preachin' somepin I thought would make 'em happy.' An' then—I been talkin' a hell of a lot. Maybe you wonder about me using bad words. Well, they ain't bad to me no more. They're jus' words folks use, an' they don't mean nothing bad with 'em. Anyways, I'll tell you one more thing I thought out; an' from a preacher it's the most unreligious thing, and I can't be a preacher no more because I thought it an' I believe it."

“What’s that?” Joad asked.

Casy looked shyly at him. “If it hits you wrong, don’t take no offense at it, will you?”

“I don’t take no offense ’cept a bust in the nose,” said Joad. “What did you figger?”

“I figgered about the Holy Sperit and the Jesus road. I figgered, ‘Why do we got to hang it on God or Jesus? Maybe,’ I figgered, ‘maybe it’s all men an’ all women we love; maybe that’s the Holy Sperit—the human sperit—the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever’body’s a part of.’ Now I sat there thinkin’ it, an’ all of a suddent—I knew it. I knew it so deep down that it was true, and I still know it.”

Joad’s eyes dropped to the ground, as though he could not meet the naked honesty in the preacher’s eyes. “You can’t hold no church with idears like that,” he said. “People would drive you out of the country with idears like that. Jumpin’ an’ yellin’. That’s what folks like. Makes ’em feel swell. When Granma got to talkin’ in tongues, you couldn’t tie her down. She could knock over a full-growed deacon with her fist.”

Casy regarded him broodingly. “Somepin I like to ast you,” he said. “Somepin that been eatin’ on me.”

“Go ahead. I’ll talk, sometimes.”

“Well”—the preacher said slowly—“here’s you that I baptized right when I was in the glory roof-tree. Got little hunks of Jesus jumpin’ outa my mouth that day. You won’t remember ’cause you was busy pullin’ that pigtail.”

“I remember,” said Joad. “That was Susy Little. She bust my finger a year later.”

“Well—did you take any good outa that baptizin’? Was your ways better?”

Joad thought about it. “No-o-o, can’t say as I felt anything.”

“Well—did you take any bad from it? Think hard.”

Joad picked up the bottle and took a swig. “They wasn’t nothing in it, good or bad. I just had fun.” He handed the flask to the preacher.

He sighed and drank and looked at the low level of the whisky and took another tiny drink. “That’s good,” he said. “I got to worryin’ about whether in messin’ around maybe I done somebody

a hurt."

Joad looked over toward his coat and saw the turtle, free of the cloth and hurrying away in the direction he had been following when Joad found him. Joad watched him for a moment and then got slowly to his feet and retrieved him and wrapped him in the coat again. "I ain't got no present for the kids," he said. "Nothin' but this ol' turtle."

"It's a funny thing," the preacher said. "I was thinkin' about ol' Tom Joad when you come along. Thinkin' I'd call in on him. I used to think he was a godless man. How is Tom?"

"I don' know how he is. I ain't been home in four years."

"Didn't he write to you?"

Joad was embarrassed. "Well, Pa wasn't no hand to write for pretty, or to write for writin'. He'd sign up his name as nice as anybody, an' lick his pencil. But Pa never did write no letters. He always says what he couldn'tell a fella with his mouth wasn'tworth leanin'on no pencil about."

"Been out travelin' around?" Casy asked.

Joad regarded him suspiciously. "Didn' you hear about me? I was in all the papers."

"No—I never. What?" He jerked one leg over the other and settled lower against the tree. The afternoon was advancing rapidly, and a richer tone was growing on the sun.

Joad said pleasantly, "Might's well tell you now an' get it over with. But if you was still preachin' I wouldn't tell, fear you get prayin' over me." He drained the last of the pint and flung it from him, and the flat brown bottle skidded lightly over the dust. "I been in McAlester them four years."

Casy swung around to him, and his brows lowered so that his tall forehead seemed even taller. "Ain't wantin' to talk about it, huh? I won't ask you no questions, if you done something bad——"

"I'd do what I done—again," said Joad. "I killed a guy in a fight. We was drunk at a dance. He got a knife in me, an' I killed him with a shovel that was layin' there. Knocked his head plumb to squash."

Casy's eyebrows resumed their normal level. "You ain't ashamed of nothin' then?"

"No," said Joad, "I ain't. I got seven years, account of he had a

knife in me. Got out in four—parole."

"Then you ain't heard nothin' about your folks for four years?"

"Oh, I heard. Ma sent me a card two years ago, an' las' Christmus Granma sent a card. Jesus, the guys in the cell block laughed! Had a tree an' shiny stuff looks like snow. It says in po'try:

> "'Merry Christmus, purty child,
> Jesus meek an' Jesus mild,
> Underneath the Christmus tree
> There's a gif ' for you from me.'

I guess Granma never read it. Prob'ly got it from a drummer an' picked out the one with the mos' shiny stuff on it. The guys in my cell block goddamn near died laughin'. Jesus Meek they called me after that. Granma never meant it funny; she jus' figgered it was so purty she wouldn' bother to read it. She lost her glasses the year I went up. Maybe she never did find 'em."

"How they treat you in McAlester?" Casy asked.

"Oh, awright. You eat regular, an' get clean clothes, and there's places to take a bath. It's pretty nice some ways. Makes it hard not havin' no women." Suddenly he laughed. "They was a guy paroled," he said. "'Bout a month he's back for breakin' parole. A guy ast him why he bust his parole. 'Well, hell,' he says. 'They got no conveniences at my old man's place. Got no 'lectric lights, got no shower baths. There ain't no books, an' the food's lousy.' Says he come back where they got a few conveniences an' he eats regular. He says it makes him feel lonesome out there in the open havin' to think what to do next. So he stole a car an' come back." Joad got out his tobacco and blew a brown paper free of the pack and rolled a cigarette. "The guy's right, too," he said. "Las' night, thinkin' where I'm gonna sleep, I got scared. An' I got thinkin' about my bunk, an' I wonder what the stir-bug I got for a cell mate is doin'. Me an' some guys had a strang band goin'. Good one. Guy said we ought to go on the radio. An' this mornin' I didn' know what time to get up. Jus' laid there waitin' for the bell to go off."

Casy chuckled. "Fella can get so he misses the noise of a saw mill."

The yellowing, dusty, afternoon light put a golden color on the land. The cornstalks looked golden. A flight of swallows swooped

overhead toward some waterhole. The turtle in Joad's coat began a new campaign of escape. Joad creased the visor of his cap. It was getting the long protruding curve of a crow's beak now. "Guess I'll mosey along," he said. "I hate to hit the sun, but it ain't so bad now."

Casy pulled himself together. "I ain't seen ol' Tom in a bug's age," he said. "I was gonna look in on him anyways. I brang Jesus to your folks for a long time, an' I never took up a collection nor nothin' but a bite to eat."

"Come along," said Joad. "Pa'll be glad to see you. He always said you got too long a pecker for a preacher." He picked up his coat roll and tightened it snugly about his shoes and turtle.

Casy gathered in his canvas sneakers and shoved his bare feet into them. "I ain't got your confidence," he said. "I'm always scared there's wire or glass under the dust. I don't know nothin' I hate so much as a cut toe."

They hesitated on the edge of the shade and then they plunged into the yellow sunlight like two swimmers hastening to get to shore. After a few fast steps they slowed to a gentle, thoughtful pace. The cornstalks threw gray shadows sideways now, and the raw smell of hot dust was in the air. The corn field ended and dark green cotton took its place, dark green leaves through a film of dust, and the bolls forming. It was spotty cotton, thick in the low places where water had stood, and bare on the high places. The plants strove against the sun. And distance, toward the horizon, was tan to invisibility. The dust road stretched out ahead of them, waving up and down. The willows of a stream lined across the west, and to the northwest a fallow section was going back to sparse brush. But the smell of burned dust was in the air, and the air was dry, so that mucus in the nose dried to a crust, and the eyes watered to keep the eyeballs from drying out.

Casy said, "See how good the corn come along until the dust got up. Been a dinger of a crop."

"Ever' year," said Joad. "Ever' year I can remember, we had a good crop comin', an' it never come. Grampa says she was good the first five plowin's, while the wild grass was still in her." The road dropped down a little hill and climbed up another rolling hill.

Casy said, "Ol' Tom's house can't be more'n a mile from here. Ain't she over that third rise?"

“Sure,” said Joad. “’Less somebody stole it, like Pa stole it.”

“Your pa stole it?”

“Sure, got it a mile an’ a half east of here an’ drug it. Was a family livin’ there, an’ they moved away. Grampa an’ Pa an’ my brother Noah like to took the whole house, but she wouldn’ come. They only got part of her. That’s why she looks so funny on one end. They cut her in two an’ drug her over with twelve head of horses and two mules. They was goin’ back for the other half an’ stick her together again, but before they got there Wink Manley come with his boys and stole the other half. Pa an’ Grampa was pretty sore, but a little later them an’ Wink got drunk together an’ laughed their heads off about it. Wink, he says his house is at stud, an’ if we’ll bring our’n over an’ breed ’em we’ll maybe get a litter of crap houses. Wink was a great ol’ fella when he was drunk. After that him an’ Pa an’ Grampa was friends. Got drunk together ever’ chance they got.”

“Tom’s a great one,” Casy agreed. They plodded dustily on down to the bottom of the draw, and then slowed their steps for the rise. Casy wiped his forehead with his sleeve and put on his flat-topped hat again. “Yes,” he repeated, “Tom was a great one. For a godless man he was a great one. I seen him in meetin’ sometimes when the sperit got into him just a little, an’ I seen him take ten-twelve foot jumps. I tell you when ol’ Tom got a dose of the Holy Sperit you got to move fast to keep from gettin’ run down an’ tromped. Jumpy as a stud horse in a box stall.”

They topped the next rise and the road dropped into an old water-cut, ugly and raw, a ragged course, and freshet scars cutting into it from both sides. A few stones were in the crossing. Joad minced across in his bare feet. “You talk about Pa,” he said. “Maybe you never seen Uncle John the time they baptized him over to Polk’s place. Why, he got to plungin’ an’ jumpin’. Jumped over a feeny bush as big as a piana. Over he’d jump, an’ back he’d jump, howlin’ like a dog-wolf in moon time. Well, Pa seen him, an’ Pa, he figgers he’s the bes’ Jesus-jumper in these parts. So Pa picks out a feeny bush ’bout twicet as big as Uncle John’s feeny bush, and Pa lets out a squawk like a sow litterin’ broken bottles, an’ he takes a run at that feeny bush an’ clears her an’ bust his right leg. That took the sperit out of Pa. Preacher wants to pray it set, but Pa says, no, by God, he’d got his heart full of havin’ a doctor. Well, they wasn’t

a doctor, but they was a travelin' dentist, an' he set her. Preacher give her a prayin' over anyways."

They plodded up the little rise on the other side of the water-cut. Now that the sun was on the wane some of its impact was gone, and while the air was hot, the hammering rays were weaker. The strung wire on crooked poles still edged the road. On the right-hand side a line of wire fence strung out across the cotton field, and the dusty green cotton was the same on both sides, dusty and dry and dark green.

Joad pointed to the boundary fence. "That there's our line. We didn't really need no fence there, but we had the wire, an' Pa kinda liked her there. Said it give him a feelin' that forty was forty. Wouldn't of had the fence if Uncle John didn' come drivin' in one night with six spools of wire in his wagon. He give 'em to Pa for a shoat. We never did know where he got that wire." They slowed for the rise, moving their feet in the deep soft dust, feeling the earth with their feet. Joad's eyes were inward on his memory. He seemed to be laughing inside himself. "Uncle John was a crazy bastard," he said. "Like what he done with that shoat." He chuckled and walked on.

Jim Casy waited impatiently. The story did not continue. Casy gave it a good long time to come out. "Well, what'd he do with that shoat?" he demanded at last, with some irritation.

"Huh? Oh! Well, he killed that shoat right there, an' he got Ma to light up the stove. He cut out pork chops an' put 'em in the pan, an' he put ribs an' a leg in the oven. He et chops till the ribs was done, an' he et ribs till the leg was done. An' then he tore into that leg. Cut off big hunks of her an' shoved 'em in his mouth. Us kids hung around slaverin', an' he give us some, but he wouldn' give Pa none. By an' by he et so much he throwed up an' went to sleep. While he's asleep us kids an' Pa finished off the leg. Well, when Uncle John woke up in the mornin' he slaps another leg in the oven. Pa says, 'John, you gonna eat that whole damn pig?' An' he says, 'I aim to, Tom, but I'm scairt some of her'll spoil 'fore I get her et, hungry as I am for pork. Maybe you better get a plate an' gimme back a couple rolls of wire.' Well, sir, Pa wasn't no fool. He jus' let Uncle John go on an' eat himself sick of pig, an' when he drove off he hadn't et much more'n half. Pa says, 'Whyn't you salt her down?' But not Uncle John; when he wants pig he wants a whole pig, an' when he's

through, he don't want no pig hangin' around. So off he goes, and Pa salts down what's left."

Casy said, "While I was still in the preachin' sperit I'd a made a lesson of that an' spoke it to you, but I don't do that no more. What you s'pose he done a thing like that for?"

"I dunno," said Joad. "He jus' got hungry for pork. Makes me hungry jus' to think of it. I had jus' four slices of roastin' pork in four years—one slice ever' Christmus."

Casy suggested elaborately, "Maybe Tom'll kill the fatted calf like for the prodigal in Scripture."

Joad laughed scornfully. "You don't know Pa. If he kills a chicken most of the squawkin' will come from Pa, not the chicken. He don't never learn. He's always savin' a pig for Christmus and then it dies in September of bloat or somepin so you can't eat it. When Uncle John wanted pork he et pork. He had her."

They moved over the curving top of the hill and saw the Joad place below them. And Joad stopped. "It ain't the same," he said. "Looka that house. Somepin's happened. They ain't nobody there." The two stood and stared at the little cluster of buildings.

Chapter 5

The owners of the land came onto the land, or more often a spokesman for the owners came. They came in closed cars, and they felt the dry earth with their fingers, and sometimes they drove big earth augers into the ground for soil tests. The tenants, from their sun-beaten dooryards, watched uneasily when the closed cars drove along the fields. And at last the owner men drove into the dooryards and sat in their cars to talk out of the windows. The tenant men stood beside the cars for a while, and then squatted on their hams and found sticks with which to mark the dust.

In the open doors the women stood looking out, and behind them the children—corn-headed children, with wide eyes, one bare foot on top of the other bare foot, and the toes working. The women and the children watched their men talking to the owner men. They were silent.

Some of the owner men were kind because they hated what they had to do, and some of them were angry because they hated to be cruel, and some of them were cold because they had long ago found that one could not be an owner unless one were cold. And all of them were caught in something larger than themselves. Some of them hated the mathematics that drove them, and some were afraid, and some worshiped the mathematics because it provided a refuge from thought and from feeling. If a bank or a finance company owned the land, the owner man said, The Bank—or the Company—needs—wants—insists—must have—as though the Bank or the Company were a monster, with thought and feeling, which had ensnared them. These last would take no responsibility for the banks or the companies because they were men and slaves, while the banks were machines and masters all at the same time. Some of the owner men were a little proud to be slaves to such cold and powerful masters. The owner men sat in the cars and explained. You know the land is poor. You've scrabbled at it long enough, God knows.

The squatting tenant men nodded and wondered and drew figures in the dust, and yes, they knew, God knows. If the dust only wouldn't fly. If the top would only stay on the soil, it might not be so bad.

The owner men went on leading to their point: You know the land's getting poorer. You know what cotton does to the land; robs it, sucks all the blood out of it.

The squatters nodded—they knew, God knew. If they could only rotate the crops they might pump blood back into the land.

Well, it's too late. And the owner men explained the workings and the thinkings of the monster that was stronger than they were. A man can hold land if he can just eat and pay taxes; he can do that.

Yes, he can do that until his crops fail one day and he has to borrow money from the bank.

But—you see, a bank or a company can't do that, because those creatures don't breathe air, don't eat side-meat. They breathe profits; they eat the interest on money. If they don't get it, they die the way you die without air, without sidemeat. It is a sad thing, but it is so. It is just so.

The squatting men raised their eyes to understand. Can't we just hang on? Maybe the next year will be a good year. God knows how much cotton next year. And with all the wars—God knows what price cotton will bring. Don't they make explosives out of cotton? And uniforms? Get enough wars and cotton'll hit the ceiling. Next year, maybe. They looked up questioningly.

We can't depend on it. The bank—the monster has to have profits all the time. It can't wait. It'll die. No, taxes go on. When the monster stops growing, it dies. It can't stay one size.

Soft fingers began to tap the sill of the car window, and hard fingers tightened on the restless drawing sticks. In the doorways of the sun-beaten tenant houses, women sighed and then shifted feet so that the one that had been down was now on top, and the toes working. Dogs came sniffing near the owner cars and wetted on all four tires one after another. And chickens lay in the sunny dust and fluffed their feathers to get the cleansing dust down to the skin. In the little sties the pigs grunted inquiringly over the muddy remnants of the slops.

The squatting men looked down again. What do you want us to do? We can't take less share of the crop—we're half starved now. The kids are hungry all the time. We got no clothes, torn an' ragged. If all the neighbors weren't the same, we'd be ashamed to go to meeting.

And at last the owner men came to the point. The tenant system won't work any more. One man on a tractor can take the place of twelve or fourteen families. Pay him a wage and take all the crop. We have to do it. We don't like to do it. But the monster's sick. Something's happened to the monster.

But you'll kill the land with cotton.

We know. We've got to take cotton quick before the land dies. Then we'll sell the land. Lots of families in the East would like to own a piece of land.

The tenant men looked up alarmed. But what'll happen to us? How'll we eat?

You'll have to get off the land. The plows'll go through the dooryard.

And now the squatting men stood up angrily. Grampa took up the land, and he had to kill the Indians and drive them away. And Pa was born here, and he killed weeds and snakes. Then a bad year came and he had to borrow a little money. An' we was born here. There in the door—our children born here. And Pa had to borrow money. The bank owned the land then, but we stayed and we got a little bit of what we raised.

We know that—all that. It's not us, it's the bank. A bank isn't like a man. Or an owner with fifty thousand acres, he isn't like a man either. That's the monster.

Sure, cried the tenant men, but it's our land. We measured it and broke it up. We were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. Even if it's no good, it's still ours. That's what makes it ours—being born on it, working it, dying on it. That makes ownership, not a paper with numbers on it.

We're sorry. It's not us. It's the monster. The bank isn't like a man.

Yes, but the bank is only made of men.

No, you're wrong there—quite wrong there. The bank is something else than men. It happens that every man in a bank hates what the bank does, and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men, I tell you. It's the monster. Men made it, but they can't control it.

The tenants cried, Grampa killed Indians, Pa killed snakes for the land. Maybe we can kill banks—they're worse than Indians and

snakes. Maybe we got to fight to keep our land, like Pa and Grampa did.

And now the owner men grew angry. You'll have to go.

But it's ours, the tenant men cried. We——

No. The bank, the monster owns it. You'll have to go.

We'll get our guns, like Grampa when the Indians came. What then?

Well—first the sheriff, and then the troops. You'll be stealing if you try to stay, you'll be murderers if you kill to stay. The monster isn't men, but it can make men do what it wants.

But if we go, where'll we go? How'll we go? We got no money.

We're sorry, said the owner men. The bank, the fifty-thousand-acre owner can't be responsible. You're on land that isn't yours. Once over the line maybe you can pick cotton in the fall. Maybe you can go on relief. Why don't you go on west to California? There's work there, and it never gets cold. Why, you can reach out anywhere and pick an orange. Why, there's always some kind of crop to work in. Why don't you go there? And the owner men started their cars and rolled away.

The tenant men squatted down on their hams again to mark the dust with a stick, to figure, to wonder. Their sunburned faces were dark, and their sun-whipped eyes were light. The women moved cautiously out of the doorways toward their men, and the children crept behind the women, cautiously, ready to run. The bigger boys squatted beside their fathers, because that made them men. After a time the women asked, What did he want?

And the men looked up for a second, and the smolder of pain was in their eyes. We got to get off. A tractor and a superintendent. Like factories.

Where'll we go? the women asked.

We don't know. We don't know.

And the women went quickly, quietly back into the houses and herded the children ahead of them. They knew that a man so hurt and so perplexed may turn in anger, even on people he loves. They left the men alone to figure and to wonder in the dust.

After a time perhaps the tenant man looked about—at the pump put in ten years ago, with a goose-neck handle and iron flowers on the spout, at the chopping block where a thousand chickens had

been killed, at the hand plow lying in the shed, and the patent crib hanging in the rafters over it.

The children crowded about the women in the houses. What we going to do, Ma? Where we going to go?

The women said, We don't know, yet. Go out and play. But don't go near your father. He might whale you if you go near him. And the women went on with the work, but all the time they watched the men squatting in the dust—perplexed and figuring.

The tractors came over the roads and into the fields, great crawlers moving like insects, having the incredible strength of insects. They crawled over the ground, laying the track and rolling on it and picking it up. Diesel tractors, puttering while they stood idle; they thundered when they moved, and then settled down to a droning roar. Snub-nosed monsters, raising the dust and sticking their snouts into it, straight down the country, across the country, through fences, through dooryards, in and out of gullies in straight lines. They did not run on the ground, but on their own roadbeds. They ignored hills and gulches, water courses, fences, houses.

The man sitting in the iron seat did not look like a man; gloved, goggled, rubber dust mask over nose and mouth, he was a part of the monster, a robot in the seat. The thunder of the cylinders sounded through the country, became one with the air and the earth, so that earth and air muttered in sympathetic vibration. The driver could not control it—straight across country it went, cutting through a dozen farms and straight back. A twitch at the controls could swerve the cat', but the driver's hands could not twitch because the monster that built the tractor, the monster that sent the tractor out, had somehow got into the driver's hands, into his brain and muscle, had goggled him and muzzled him—goggled his mind, muzzled his speech, goggled his perception, muzzled his protest. He could not see the land as it was, he could not smell the land as it smelled; his feet did not stamp the clods or feel the warmth and power of the earth. He sat in an iron seat and stepped on iron pedals. He could not cheer or beat or curse or encourage the extension of his power, and because of this he could not cheer or whip or curse or encourage himself. He did not know or own or trust or beseech the land. If a seed dropped did not germinate, it was nothing. If the young thrusting plant withered in drought or

drowned in a flood of rain, it was no more to the driver than to the tractor.

He loved the land no more than the bank loved the land. He could admire the tractor—its machined surfaces, its surge of power, the roar of its detonating cylinders; but it was not his tractor. Behind the tractor rolled the shining disks, cutting the earth with blades—not plowing but surgery, pushing the cut earth to the right where the second row of disks cut it and pushed it to the left; slicing blades shining, polished by the cut earth. And pulled behind the disks, the harrows combing with iron teeth so that the little clods broke up and the earth lay smooth. Behind the harrows, the long seeders—twelve curved iron penes erected in the foundry, orgasms set by gears, raping methodically, raping without passion. The driver sat in his iron seat and he was proud of the straight lines he did not will, proud of the tractor he did not own or love, proud of the power he could not control. And when that crop grew, and was harvested, no man had crumbled a hot clod in his fingers and let the earth sift past his fingertips. No man had touched the seed, or lusted for the growth. Men ate what they had not raised, had no connection with the bread. The land bore under iron, and under iron gradually died; for it was not loved or hated, it had no prayers or curses.

At noon the tractor driver stopped sometimes near a tenant house and opened his lunch: sandwiches wrapped in waxed paper, white bread, pickle, cheese, Spam, a piece of pie branded like an engine part. He ate without relish. And tenants not yet moved away came out to see him, looked curiously while the goggles were taken off, and the rubber dust mask, leaving white circles around the eyes and a large white circle around nose and mouth. The exhaust of the tractor puttered on, for fuel is so cheap it is more efficient to leave the engine running than to heat the Diesel nose for a new start. Curious children crowded close, ragged children who ate their fried dough as they watched. They watched hungrily the unwrapping of the sandwiches, and their hunger-sharpened noses smelled the pickle, cheese, and Spam. They didn't speak to the driver. They watched his hand as it carried food to his mouth. They did not watch him chewing; their eyes followed the hand that held the sandwich. After a while the tenant who could not leave the place came out and squatted in the shade beside the tractor.

“Why, you’re Joe Davis’s boy!”

“Sure,” the driver said.

“Well, what you doing this kind of work for—against your own people?”

“Three dollars a day. I got damn sick of creeping for my dinner—and not getting it. I got a wife and kids. We got to eat. Three dollars a day, and it comes every day.”

“That’s right,” the tenant said. “But for your three dollars a day fifteen or twenty families can’t eat at all. Nearly a hundred people have to go out and wander on the roads for your three dollars a day. Is that right?”

And the driver said, “Can’t think of that. Got to think of my own kids. Three dollars a day, and it comes every day. Times are changing, mister, don’t you know? Can’t make a living on the land unless you’ve got two, five, ten thousand acres and a tractor. Crop land isn’t for little guys like us any more. You don’t kick up a howl because you can’t make Fords, or because you’re not the telephone company. Well, crops are like that now. Nothing to do about it. You try to get three dollars a day someplace. That’s the only way.”

The tenant pondered. “Funny thing how it is. If a man owns a little property, that property is him, it’s part of him, and it’s like him. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle it and be sad when it isn’t doing well, and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him, and some way he’s bigger because he owns it. Even if he isn’t successful he’s big with his property. That is so.”

And the tenant pondered more. “But let a man get property he doesn’t see, or can’t take time to get his fingers in, or can’t be there to walk on it—why, then the property is the man. He can’t do what he wants, he can’t think what he wants. The property is the man, stronger than he is. And he is small, not big. Only his possessions are big—and he’s the servant of his property. That is so, too.”

The driver munched the branded pie and threw the crust away. “Times are changed, don’t you know? Thinking about stuff like that don’t feed the kids. Get your three dollars a day, feed your kids. You got no call to worry about anybody’s kids but your own. You get a reputation for talking like that, and you’ll never get three dollars a day. Big shots won’t give you three dollars a day if you worry about anything but your three dollars a day.”

“Nearly a hundred people on the road for your three dollars. Where will we go?”

“And that reminds me,” the driver said, “you better get out soon. I’m going through the dooryard after dinner.”

“You filled in the well this morning.”

“I know. Had to keep the line straight. But I’m going through the dooryard after dinner. Got to keep the lines straight. And—well, you know Joe Davis, my old man, so I’ll tell you this. I got orders wherever there’s a family not moved out—if I have an accident—you know, get too close and cave the house in a little—well, I might get a couple of dollars. And my youngest kid never had no shoes yet.”

“I built it with my hands. Straightened old nails to put the sheathing on. Rafters are wired to the stringers with baling wire. It’s mine. I built it. You bump it down—I’ll be in the window with a rifle. You even come too close and I’ll pot you like a rabbit.”

“It’s not me. There’s nothing I can do. I’ll lose my job if I don’t do it. And look—suppose you kill me? They’ll just hang you, but long before you’re hung there’ll be another guy on the tractor, and he’ll bump the house down. You’re not killing the right guy.”

“That’s so,” the tenant said. “Who gave you orders? I’ll go after him. He’s the one to kill.”

“You’re wrong. He got his orders from the bank. The bank told him, ‘Clear those people out or it’s your job.’”

“Well, there’s a president of the bank. There’s a board of directors. I’ll fill up the magazine of the rifle and go into the bank.”

The driver said, “Fellow was telling me the bank gets orders from the East. The orders were, ‘Make the land show profit or we’ll close you up.’”

“But where does it stop? Who can we shoot? I don’t aim to starve to death before I kill the man that’s starving me.”

“I don’t know. Maybe there’s nobody to shoot. Maybe the thing isn’t men at all. Maybe, like you said, the property’s doing it. Anyway I told you my orders.”

“I got to figure,” the tenant said. “We all got to figure. There’s some way to stop this. It’s not like lightning or earthquakes. We’ve got a bad thing made by men, and by God that’s something we can change.” The tenant sat in his doorway, and the driver thundered

his engine and started off, tracks falling and curving, harrows combing, and the phalli of the seeder slipping into the ground. Across the dooryard the tractor cut, and the hard, foot-beaten ground was seeded field, and the tractor cut through again; the uncut space was ten feet wide. And back he came. The iron guard bit into the house-corner, crumbled the wall, and wrenched the little house from its foundation so that it fell sideways, crushed like a bug. And the driver was goggled and a rubber mask covered his nose and mouth. The tractor cut a straight line on, and the air and the ground vibrated with its thunder. The tenant man stared after it, his rifle in his hand. His wife was beside him, and the quiet children behind. And all of them stared after the tractor.

Chapter 6

The Reverend Casy and young Tom stood on the hill and looked down on the Joad place. The small unpainted house was mashed at one corner, and it had been pushed off its foundations so that it slumped at an angle, its blind front windows pointing at a spot of sky well above the horizon. The fences were gone and the cotton grew in the dooryard and up against the house, and the cotton was about the shed barn. The outhouse lay on its side, and the cotton grew close against it. Where the dooryard had been pounded hard by the bare feet of children and by stamping horses' hooves and by the broad wagon wheels, it was cultivated now, and the dark green, dusty cotton grew. Young Tom stared for a long time at the ragged willow beside the dry horse trough, at the concrete base where the pump had been. "Jesus!" he said at last. "Hell musta popped here. There ain't nobody livin' there." At last he moved quickly down the hill, and Casy followed him. He looked into the barn shed, deserted, a little ground straw on the floor, and at the mule stall in the corner. And as he looked in, there was a skittering on the floor and a family of mice faded in under the straw. Joad paused at the entrance to the tool-shed leanto, and no tools were there—a broken plow point, a mess of hay wire in the corner, an iron wheel from a hayrake and a rat-gnawed mule collar, a flat gallon oil can crusted with dirt and oil, and a pair of torn overalls hanging on a nail. "There ain't nothin' left," said Joad. "We had pretty nice tools. There ain't nothin' left."

Casy said, "If I was still a preacher I'd say the arm of the Lord had struck. But now I don't know what happened. I been away. I didn't hear nothin'." They walked toward the concrete well-cap, walked through cotton plants to get to it, and the bolls were forming on the cotton, and the land was cultivated.

"We never planted here," Joad said. "We always kept this clear. Why, you can't get a horse in now without he tromps the cotton." They paused at the dry watering trough, and the proper weeds that should grow under a trough were gone and the old thick wood of the trough was dry and cracked. On the well-cap the bolts that had held the pump stuck up, their threads rusty and the nuts gone. Joad looked into the tube of the well and spat and listened. He dropped a

clod down the well and listened. “She was a good well,” he said. “I can’t hear water.” He seemed reluctant to go to the house. He dropped clod after clod down the well. “Maybe they’re all dead,” he said. “But somebody’d a told me. I’d a got word some way.”

“Maybe they left a letter or something to tell in the house. Would they of knowed you was comin’ out?”

“I don’ know,” said Joad. “No, I guess not. I didn’ know myself till a week ago.”

“Le’s look in the house. She’s all pushed out a shape. Something knocked the hell out of her.” They walked slowly toward the sagging house. Two of the supports of the porch roof were pushed out so that the roof flopped down on one end. And the house-corner was crushed in. Through a maze of splintered wood the room at the corner was visible. The front door hung open inward, and a low strong gate across the front door hung outward on leather hinges.

Joad stopped at the step, a twelve-by-twelve timber. “Doorstep’s here,” he said. “But they’re gone—or Ma’s dead.” He pointed to the low gate across the front door. “If Ma was anywheres about, that gate’d be shut an’ hooked. That’s one thing she always done—seen that gate was shut.” His eyes were warm. “Ever since the pig got in over to Jacobs’ an’ et the baby. Milly Jacobs was jus’ out in the barn. She come in while the pig was still eatin’ it. Well, Milly Jacobs was in a family way, an’ she went ravin’. Never did get over it. Touched ever since. But Ma took a lesson from it. She never lef’ that pig gate open ’less she was in the house herself. Never did forget. No—they’re gone—or dead.” He climbed to the split porch and looked into the kitchen. The windows were broken out, and throwing rocks lay on the floor, and the floor and walls sagged steeply away from the door, and the sifted dust was on the boards. Joad pointed to the broken glass and the rocks. “Kids,” he said.“They’ll go twenty miles to bust a window. I done it myself. They know when a house is empty, they know. That’s the fust thing kids do when folks move out.” The kitchen was empty of furniture, stove gone and the round stovepipe hole in the wall showing light. On the sink shelf lay an old beer opener and a broken fork with its wooden handle gone. Joad slipped cautiously into the room, and the floor groaned under his weight. An old copy of the Philadelphia *Ledger* was on the floor against the wall, its pages yellow and curling. Joad looked into the bedroom—no bed, no chairs, nothing.

On the wall a picture of an Indian girl in color, labeled Red Wing. A bed slat leaning against the wall, and in one corner a woman's high button shoe, curled up at the toe and broken over the instep. Joad picked it up and looked at it. "I remember this," he said. "This was Ma's. It's all wore out now. Ma liked them shoes. Had 'em for years. No, they've went—an' took ever'thing."

The sun had lowered until it came through the angled end windows now, and it flashed on the edges of the broken glass. Joad turned at last and went out and crossed the porch. He sat down on the edge of it and rested his bare feet on the twelve-by-twelve step. The evening light was on the fields, and the cotton plants threw long shadows on the ground, and the molting willow tree threw a long shadow.

Casy sat down beside Joad. "They never wrote you nothin'?" he asked.

"No. Like I said, they wasn't people to write. Pa could write, but he wouldn'. Didn't like to. It give him the shivers to write. He could work out a catalogue order as good as the nex' fella, but he wouldn' write no letters just for ducks." They sat side by side, staring off into the distance. Joad laid his rolled coat on the porch beside him. His independent hands rolled a cigarette, smoothed it and lighted it, and he inhaled deeply and blew the smoke out through his nose. "Somepin's wrong," he said. "I can't put my finger on her. I got an itch that somepin's wronger'n hell. Just this house pushed aroun' an' my folks gone."

Casy said, "Right over there the ditch was, where I done the baptizin'. You wasn't mean, but you was tough. Hung onto that little girl's pigtail like a bulldog. We baptize' you both in the name of the Holy Ghos', and still you hung on. Ol' Tom says, 'Hol' 'im under water.' So I shove your head down till you start to bubblin' before you'd let go a that pigtail. You wasn't mean, but you was tough. Sometimes a tough kid grows up with a big jolt of the sperit in him."

A lean gray cat came sneaking out of the barn and crept through the cotton plants to the end of the porch. It leaped silently up to the porch and crept low-belly toward the men. It came to a place between and behind the two, and then it sat down, and its tail stretched out straight and flat to the floor, and the last inch of it flicked. The cat sat and looked off into the distance where the men

were looking.

Joad glanced around at it. “By God! Look who’s here. Somebody stayed.” He put out his hand, but the cat leaped away out of reach and sat down and licked the pads of its lifted paw. Joad looked at it, and his face was puzzled. “I know what’s the matter,” he cried. “That cat jus’ made me figger what’s wrong.”

“Seems to me there’s lots wrong,” said Casy.

“No, it’s more’n jus’ this place. Whyn’t that cat jus’ move in with some neighbors—with the Rances. How come nobody ripped some lumber off this house? Ain’t been nobody here for three-four months, an’ nobody’s stole no lumber. Nice planks on the barn shed, plenty good planks on the house, winda frames—an’ nobody’s took ’em. That ain’t right. That’s what was botherin’ me, an’ I couldn’t catch hold of her.”

“Well, what’s that figger out for you?” Casy reached down and slipped off his sneakers and wriggled his long toes on the step.

“I don’ know. Seems like maybe there ain’t any neighbors. If there was, would all them nice planks be here? Why, Jesus Christ! Albert Rance took his family, kids an’ dogs an’ all, into Oklahoma City one Christmus. They was gonna visit with Albert’s cousin. Well, folks aroun’ here thought Albert moved away without sayin’ nothin’—figgered maybe he got debts or some woman’s squarin’ off at him. When Albert come back a week later there wasn’t a thing lef’ in his house—stove was gone, beds was gone, winda frames was gone, an’ eight feet of plankin’ was gone off the south side of the house so you could look right through her. He come drivin’ home just as Muley Graves was goin’ away with the doors an’ the well pump. Took Albert two weeks drivin’ aroun’ the neighbors’ ’fore he got his stuff back.”

Casy scratched his toes luxuriously. “Didn’t nobody give him an argument? All of ’em jus’ give the stuff up?”

“Sure. They wasn’t stealin’ it. They thought he lef ’ it, an’ they jus’ took it. He got all of it back—all but a sofa pilla, velvet with a pitcher of an Injun on it. Albert claimed Grampa got it. Claimed Grampa got Injun blood, that’s why he wants that pitcher. Well, Grampa did get her, but he didn’t give a damn about the pitcher on it. He jus’ liked her. Used to pack her aroun’ an’ he’d put her wherever he was gonna sit. He never would give her back to Albert. Says, ‘If Albert wants this pilla so bad, let him come an’ get her. But

he better come shootin', 'cause I'll blow his goddamn stinkin' head off if he comes messin' aroun' my pilla.' So finally Albert give up an' made Grampa a present of that pilla. It give Grampa idears, though. He took to savin' chicken feathers. Says he's gonna have a whole damn bed of feathers. But he never got no feather bed. One time Pa got mad at a skunk under the house. Pa slapped that skunk with a two-by-four, and Ma burned all Grampa's feathers so we could live in the house." He laughed. "Grampa's a tough ol' bastard. Jus' set on that Injun pilla an' says, 'Let Albert come an' get her. Why,' he says, 'I'll take that squirt and wring 'im out like a pair of drawers.'"

The cat crept close between the men again, and its tail lay flat and its whiskers jerked now and then. The sun dropped low toward the horizon and the dusty air was red and golden. The cat reached out a gray questioning paw and touched Joad's coat. He looked around. "Hell, I forgot the turtle. I ain't gonna pack it all over hell." He unwrapped the land turtle and pushed it under the house. But in a moment it was out, headed southwest as it had been from the first. The cat leaped at it and struck at its straining head and slashed at its moving feet. The old, hard, humorous head was pulled in, and the thick tail slapped in under the shell, and when the cat grew tired of waiting for it and walked off, the turtle headed on southwest again.

Young Tom Joad and the preacher watched the turtle go—waving its legs and boosting its heavy, high-domed shell along toward the southwest. The cat crept along behind for a while, but in a dozen yards it arched its back to a strong taut bow and yawned, and came stealthily back toward the seated men.

"Where the hell you s'pose he's goin'?" said Joad. "I seen turtles all my life. They're always goin' someplace. They always seem to want to get there." The gray cat seated itself between and behind them again. It blinked slowly. The skin over its shoulders jerked forward under a flea, and then slipped slowly back. The cat lifted a paw and inspected it, flicked its claws out and in again experimentally, and licked its pads with a shell-pink tongue. The red sun touched the horizon and spread out like a jellyfish, and the sky above it seemed much brighter and more alive than it had been. Joad unrolled his new yellow shoes from his coat, and he brushed his dusty feet with his hand before he slipped them on.

The preacher, staring off across the fields, said, "Somebody's

comin'. Look! Down there, right through the cotton."

Joad looked where Casy's finger pointed. "Comin' afoot," he said. "Can't see 'im for the dust he raises. Who the hell's comin' here?" They watched the figure approaching in the evening light, and the dust it raised was reddened by the setting sun. "Man," said Joad. The man drew closer, and as he walked past the barn, Joad said, "Why, I know him. You know him—that's Muley Graves." And he called, "Hey, Muley! How ya?"

The approaching man stopped, startled by the call, and then he came on quickly. He was a lean man, rather short. His movements were jerky and quick. He carried a gunny sack in his hand. His blue jeans were pale at knee and seat, and he wore an old black suit coat, stained and spotted, the sleeves torn loose from the shoulders in back, and ragged holes worn through at the elbows. His black hat was as stained as his coat, and the band, torn half free, flopped up and down as he walked. Muley's face was smooth and unwrinkled, but it wore the truculent look of a bad child's, the mouth held tight and small, the little eyes half scowling, half petulant.

"You remember Muley," Joad said softly to the preacher.

"Who's that?" the advancing man called. Joad did not answer. Muley came close, very close, before he made out the faces. "Well, I'll be damned," he said. "It's Tommy Joad. When'd you get out, Tommy?"

"Two days ago," said Joad. "Took a little time to hitchhike home. An' look here what I find. Where's my folks, Muley? What's the house all smashed up for, an' cotton planted in the dooryard?"

"By God, it's lucky I come by!" said Muley. "'Cause ol' Tom worried himself. When they was fixin' to move I was settin' in the kitchen there. I jus' tol' Tom I wan't gonna move, by God. I tol' him that, an' Tom says, 'I'm worryin' myself about Tommy. S'pose he comes home an' they ain't nobody here. What'll he think?' I says, 'Whyn't you write down a letter?' An' Tom says, 'Maybe I will. I'll think about her. But if I don't, you keep your eye out for Tommy if you're still aroun'.''I'll be aroun',' I says. 'I'll be aroun' till hell freezes over. There ain't nobody can run a guy name of Graves outa this country.' An' they ain't done it, neither."

Joad said impatiently, "Where's my folks? Tell about you standin' up to 'em later, but where's my folks?"

"Well, they was gonna stick her out when the bank come to

tractorin' off the place. Your grampa stood out here with a rifle, an' he blowed the headlights off that cat', but she come on just the same. Your grampa didn't wanta kill the guy drivin' that cat', an' that was Willy Feeley, an' Willy knowed it, so he jus' come on, an' bumped the hell outa the house, an' give her a shake like a dog shakes a rat. Well, it took somepin outa Tom. Kinda got into 'im. He ain't been the same ever since."

"Where is my folks?" Joad spoke angrily.

"What I'm tellin' you. Took three trips with your Uncle John's wagon. Took the stove an' the pump an' the beds. You should a seen them beds go out with all them kids an' your granma an' grampa settin' up against the headboard, an' your brother Noah settin' there smokin' a cigareet, an' spittin' la-de-da over the side of the wagon." Joad opened his mouth to speak. "They're all at your Uncle John's," Muley said quickly.

"Oh! All at John's. Well, what they doin' there? Now stick to her for a second, Muley. Jus' stick to her. In jus' a minute you can go on your own way. What they doin' there?"

"Well, they been choppin' cotton, all of 'em, even the kids an' your grampa. Gettin' money together so they can shove on west. Gonna buy a car and shove on west where it's easy livin'. There ain't nothin' here. Fifty cents a clean acre for choppin' cotton, an' folks beggin' for the chance to chop."

"An' they ain't gone yet?"

"No," said Muley. "Not that I know. Las' I heard was four days ago when I seen your brother Noah out shootin' jack-rabbits, an' he says they're aimin' to go in about two weeks. John got his notice he got to get off. You jus' go on about eight miles to John's place. You'll find your folks piled in John's house like gophers in a winter burrow."

"O.K." said Joad. "Now you can ride on your own way. You ain't changed a bit, Muley. If you want to tell about somepin off northwest, you point your nose straight south-east."

Muley said truculently, "You ain't changed neither. You was a smart-aleck kid, an' you're still a smart aleck. You ain't tellin' me how to skin my life, by any chancet?"

Joad grinned. "No, I ain't. If you wanta drive your head into a pile a broken glass, there ain't nobody can tell you different. You

know this here preacher, don't you, Muley? Rev. Casy."

"Why, sure, sure. Didn't look over. Remember him well." Casy stood up and the two shook hands. "Glad to see you again," said Muley. "You ain't been aroun' for a hell of a long time."

"I been off a-askin' questions," said Casy. "What happened here? Why they kickin' folks off the lan'?"

Muley's mouth snapped shut so tightly that a little parrot's beak in the middle of his upper lip stuck down over his under lip. He scowled. "Them sons-a-bitches," he said. "Them dirty sons-a-bitches. I tell ya, men, I'm stayin'. They ain't gettin' rid a me. If they throw me off, I'll come back, an' if they figger I'll be quiet underground, why, I'll take couple-three of the sons-a-bitches along for company." He patted a heavy weight in his side coat pocket. "I ain't a-goin'. My pa come here fifty years ago. An' I ain't a-goin'."

Joad said, "What's the idear of kickin' the folks off?"

"Oh! They talked pretty about it. You know what kinda years we been havin'. Dust comin' up an' spoilin' ever'thing so a man didn't get enough crop to plug up an ant's ass. An' ever'body got bills at the grocery. You know how it is. Well, the folks that owns the lan' says, 'We can't afford to keep no tenants.' An' they says, 'The share a tenant gets is jus' the margin a profit we can't afford to lose.' An' they says, 'If we put all our lan' in one piece we can jus' hardly make her pay.' So they tractored all the tenants off a the lan'. All 'cept me, an' by God I ain't goin'. Tommy, you know me. You knowed me all your life."

"Damn right," said Joad, "all my life."

"Well, you know I ain't a fool. I know this land ain't much good. Never was much good 'cept for grazin'. Never should a broke her up. An' now she's cottoned damn near to death. If on'y they didn' tell me I got to get off, why, I'd prob'y be in California right now a-eatin' grapes an' a-pickin' an orange when I wanted. But them sons-a-bitches says I got to get off—an', Jesus Christ, a man can't, when he's tol' to!"

"Sure," said Joad. "I wonder Pa went so easy. I wonder Grampa didn' kill nobody. Nobody never tol' Grampa where to put his feet. An' Ma ain't nobody you can push aroun', neither. I seen her beat the hell out of a tin peddler with a live chicken one time 'cause he give her a argument. She had the chicken in one han', an' the ax in the other, about to cut its head off. She aimed to go for that peddler

with the ax, but she forgot which hand was which, an' she takes after him with the chicken. Couldn' even eat that chicken when she got done. They wasn't nothing but a pair a legs in her han'. Grampa throwed his hip outa joint laughin'. How'd my folks go so easy?"

"Well, the guy that come aroun' talked nice as pie. 'You got to get off. It ain't my fault.' 'Well,' I says, 'whose fault is it? I'll go an' I'll nut the fella.''It's the Shawnee Lan' an' Cattle Company. I jus' got orders.' 'Who's the Shawnee Lan' an' Cattle Company?''It ain't nobody. It's a company.' Got a fella crazy. There wasn't nobody you could lay for. Lot a the folks jus' got tired out lookin' for somepin to be mad at—but not me. I'm mad at all of it. I'm stayin'."

A large red drop of sun lingered on the horizon and then dripped over and was gone, and the sky was brilliant over the spot where it had gone, and a torn cloud, like a bloody rag, hung over the spot of its going. And dusk crept over the sky from the eastern horizon, and darkness crept over the land from the east. The evening star flashed and glittered in the dusk. The gray cat sneaked away toward the open barn shed and passed inside like a shadow.

Joad said, "Well, we ain't gonna walk no eight miles to Uncle John's place tonight. My dogs is burned up. How's it if we go to your place, Muley? That's on'y about a mile."

"Won't do no good." Muley seemed embarrassed. "My wife an' the kids an' her brother all took an' went to California. They wasn't nothin' to eat. They wasn't as mad as me, so they went. They wasn't nothin' to eat here."

The preacher stirred nervously. "You should of went too. You shouldn't of broke up the fambly."

"I couldn'," said Muley Graves. "Somepin jus' wouldn' let me."

"Well, by God, I'm hungry," said Joad. "Four solemn years I been eatin' right on the minute. My guts is yellin' bloody murder. What you gonna eat, Muley? How you been gettin' your dinner?"

Muley said ashamedly, "For a while I et frogs an' squirrels an' prairie dogs sometimes. Had to do it. But now I got some wire nooses on the tracks in the dry stream brush. Get rabbits, an' sometimes a prairie chicken. Skunks get caught, an' coons, too." He reached down, picked up his sack, and emptied it on the porch. Two cottontails and a jackrabbit fell out and rolled over limply, soft and furry.

“God Awmighty,” said Joad, “it’s more’n four years sence I’ve et fresh-killed meat.”

Casy picked up one of the cottontails and held it in his hand. “You sharin’ with us, Muley Graves?” he asked.

Muley fidgeted in embarrassment. “I ain’t got no choice in the matter.” He stopped on the ungracious sound of his words. “That ain’t like I mean it. That ain’t. I mean”—he stumbled—“what I mean, if a fella’s got somepin to eat an’ another fella’s hungry—why, the first fella ain’t got no choice. I mean, s’pose I pick up my rabbits an’ go off somewheres an’ eat ’em. See?”

“I see,” said Casy. “I can see that. Muley sees somepin there, Tom. Muley’s got a-holt of somepin, an’ it’s too big for him, an’ it’s too big for me.”

Young Tom rubbed his hands together. “Who got a knife? Le’s get at these here miserable rodents. Le’s get at ’em.”

Muley reached in his pants pocket and produced a large horn-handled pocket knife. Tom Joad took it from him, opened a blade, and smelled it. He drove the blade again and again into the ground and smelled it again, wiped it on his trouser leg, and felt the edge with his thumb.

Muley took a quart bottle of water out of his hip pocket and set it on the porch. “Go easy on that there water,” he said. “That’s all there is. This here well’s filled in.”

Tom took up a rabbit in his hand. “One of you go get some bale wire outa the barn. We’ll make a fire with some a this broken plank from the house.” He looked at the dead rabbit. “There ain’t nothin’ so easy to get ready as a rabbit,” he said. He lifted the skin of the back, slit it, put his fingers in the hole, and tore the skin off. It slipped off like a stocking, slipped off the body to the neck, and off the legs to the paws. Joad picked up the knife again and cut off head and feet. He laid the skin down, slit the rabbit along the ribs, shook out the intestines onto the skin, and then threw the mess off into the cotton field. And the clean-muscled little body was ready. Joad cut off the legs and cut the meaty back into two pieces. He was picking up the second rabbit when Casy came back with a snarl of bale wire in his hand. “Now build up a fire and put some stakes up,” said Joad. “Jesus Christ, I’m hungry for these here creatures!” He cleaned and cut up the rest of the rabbits and strung them on the wire. Muley and Casy tore splintered boards from the wrecked

house-corner and started a fire, and they drove a stake into the ground on each side to hold the wire.

Muley came back to Joad. “Look out for boils on that jackrabbit,” he said. “I don’t like to eat no jackrabbit with boils.” He took a little cloth bag from his pocket and put it on the porch.

Joad said, “The jack was clean as a whistle—Jesus God, you got salt too? By any chance you got some plates an’ a tent in your pocket?” He poured salt in his hand and sprinkled it over the pieces of rabbit strung on the wire.

The fire leaped and threw shadows on the house, and the dry wood crackled and snapped. The sky was almost dark now and the stars were out sharply. The gray cat came out of the barn shed and trotted miaowing toward the fire, but, nearly there, it turned and went directly to one of the little piles of rabbit entrails on the ground. It chewed and swallowed, and the entrails hung from its mouth.

Casy sat on the ground beside the fire, feeding it broken pieces of board, pushing the long boards in as the flame ate off their ends. The evening bats flashed into the firelight and out again. The cat crouched back and licked its lips and washed its face and whiskers.

Joad held up his rabbit-laden wire between his two hands and walked to the fire. “Here, take one end, Muley. Wrap your end around that stake. That’s good, now! Let’s tighten her up. We ought to wait till the fire’s burned down, but I can’t wait.” He made the wire taut, then found a stick and slipped the pieces of meat along the wire until they were over the fire. And the flames licked up around the meat and hardened and glazed the surfaces. Joad sat down by the fire, but with his stick he moved and turned the rabbit so that it would not become sealed to the wire. “This here is a party,” he said. “Salt, Muley’s got, an’ water an’ rabbits. I wish he got a pot of hominy in his pocket. That’s all I wish.”

Muley said over the fire, “You fellas’d think I’m touched, the way I live.”

“Touched, nothin’,” said Joad. “If you’re touched, I wisht ever’body was touched.”

Muley continued, “Well, sir, it’s a funny thing. Somepin went an’ happened to me when they tol’ me I had to get off the place. Fust I was gonna go in an’ kill a whole flock a people. Then all my folks all went away out west. An’ I got wanderin’ aroun’. Jus’ walkin’

aroun'. Never went far. Slep' where I was. I was gonna sleep here tonight. That's why I come. I'd tell myself, 'I'm lookin' after things so when all the folks come back it'll be all right.' But I knowed that wan't true. There ain't nothin' to look after. The folks ain't never comin' back. I'm jus' wanderin' aroun' like a damn ol' graveyard ghos'."

"Fella gets use' to a place, it's hard to go," said Casy. "Fella gets use' to a way a thinkin', it's hard to leave. I ain't a preacher no more, but all the time I find I'm prayin', not even thinkin' what I'm doin'."

Joad turned the pieces of meat over on the wire. The juice was dripping now, and every drop, as it fell in the fire, shot up a spurt of flame. The smooth surface of the meat was crinkling up and turning a faint brown. "Smell her," said Joad. "Jesus, look down an' jus' smell her!"

Muley went on, "Like a damn ol' graveyard ghos'. I been goin' aroun' the places where stuff happened. Like there's a place over by our forty; in a gully they's a bush. Fust time I ever laid with a girl was there. Me fourteen an' stampin' an' jerkin' an' snortin' like a buck deer, randy as a billygoat. So I went there an' I laid down on the groun', an' I seen it all happen again. An' there's the place down by the barn where Pa got gored to death by a bull. An' his blood is right in that groun', right now. Mus' be. Nobody never washed it out. An' I put my han' on that groun' where my own pa's blood is part of it." He paused uneasily. "You fellas think I'm touched?"

Joad turned the meat, and his eyes were inward. Casy, feet drawn up, stared into the fire. Fifteen feet back from the men the fed cat was sitting, the long gray tail wrapped neatly around the front feet. A big owl shrieked as it went overhead, and the firelight showed its white underside and the spread of its wings.

"No," said Casy. "You're lonely—but you ain't touched."

Muley's tight little face was rigid. "I put my han' right on the groun' where that blood is still. An' I seen my pa with a hole through his ches', an' I felt him shiver up against me like he done, an' I seen him kind of settle back an' reach with his han's an' his feet. An' I seen his eyes all milky with hurt, an' then he was still an' his eyes so clear—lookin' up. An' me a little kid settin' there, not cryin' nor nothin', jus' settin' there." He shook his head sharply. Joad turned the meat over and over. "An' I went in the room where

Joe was born. Bed wasn't there, but it was the room. An' all them things is true, an' they're right in the place they happened. Joe come to life right there. He give a big ol' gasp an' then he let out a squawk you could hear a mile, an' his granma standin' there says, 'That's a daisy, that's a daisy,' over an' over. An' her so proud she bust three cups that night."

Joad cleared his throat. "Think we better eat her now."

"Let her get good an' done, good an' brown, awmost black," said Muley irritably. "I wanta talk. I ain't talked to nobody. If I'm touched, I'm touched, an' that's the end of it. Like a ol' graveyard ghos' goin' to neighbors' houses in the night. Peters', Jacobs', Rance's, Joad's; an' the houses all dark, standin' like miser'ble ratty boxes, but they was good parties an' dancin'. An' there was meetin's and shoutin' glory. They was weddin's, all in them houses. An' then I'd want to go in town an' kill folks. 'Cause what'd they take when they tractored the folks off the lan'? What'd they get so their 'margin a profit' was safe? They got Pa dyin' on the groun', an' Joe yellin' his first breath, an' me jerkin' like a billy goat under a bush in the night. What'd they get? God knows the lan' ain't no good. Nobody been able to make a crop for years. But them sons-a-bitches at their desks, they jus' chopped folks in two for their margin a profit. They jus' cut 'em in two. Place where folks live is them folks. They ain't whole, out lonely on the road in a piled-up car. They ain't alive no more. Them sons-a-bitches killed 'em." And he was silent, his thin lips still moving, his chest still panting. He sat and looked down at his hands in the firelight. "I—I ain't talked to nobody for a long time," he apologized softly. "I been sneakin' aroun' like a ol' graveyard ghos'."

Casy pushed the long boards into the fire and the flames licked up around them and leaped up toward the meat again. The house cracked loudly as the cooler night air contracted the wood. Casy said quietly, "I gotta see them folks that's gone out on the road. I got a feelin' I got to see them. They gonna need help no preachin' can give 'em. Hope of heaven when their lives ain't lived? Holy Sperit when their own sperit is downcast an' sad? They gonna need help. They got to live before they can afford to die."

Joad cried nervously, "Jesus Christ, le's eat this meat 'fore it's smaller'n a cooked mouse! Look at her. Smell her." He leaped to his feet and slid the pieces of meat along the wire until they were clear

of the fire. He took Muley's knife and sawed through a piece of meat until it was free of the wire. "Here's for the preacher," he said.

"I tol' you I ain't no preacher."

"Well, here's for the man, then." He cut off another piece. "Here, Muley, if you ain't too goddamn upset to eat. This here's jackrabbit. Tougher'n a bull-bitch." He sat back and clamped his long teeth on the meat and tore out a great bite and chewed it. "Jesus Christ! Hear her crunch!" And he tore out another bite ravenously.

Muley still sat regarding his meat. "Maybe I oughtn' to a-talked like that," he said. "Fella should maybe keep stuff like that in his head."

Casy looked over, his mouth full of rabbit. He chewed, and his muscled throat convulsed in swallowing. "Yes, you should talk," he said. "Sometimes a sad man can talk the sadness right out through his mouth. Sometimes a killin' man can talk the murder right out of his mouth an' not do no murder. You done right. Don't you kill nobody if you can help it." And he bit out another hunk of rabbit. Joad tossed the bones in the fire and jumped up and cut more off the wire. Muley was eating slowly now, and his nervous little eyes went from one to the other of his companions. Joad ate scowling like an animal, and a ring of grease formed around his mouth.

For a long time Muley looked at him, almost timidly. He put down the hand that held the meat. "Tommy," he said.

Joad looked up and did not stop gnawing the meat. "Yeah?" he said, around a mouthful.

"Tommy, you ain't mad with me talkin' about killin' people? You ain't huffy, Tom?"

"No," said Tom. "I ain't huffy. It's jus' somepin that happened."

"Ever'body knowed it was no fault of yours," said Muley. "Ol' man Turnbull said he was gonna get you when ya come out. Says nobody can kill one a his boys. All the folks hereabouts talked him outa it, though."

"We was drunk," Joad said softly. "Drunk at a dance. I don' know how she started. An' then I felt that knife go in me, an' that sobered me up. Fust thing I see is Herb comin' for me again with his knife. They was this here shovel leanin' against the schoolhouse, so I grabbed it an' smacked 'im over the head. I never had nothing against Herb. He was a nice fella. Come a-bullin' after my sister

Rosasharn when he was a little fella. No, I liked Herb."

"Well, ever'body tol' his pa that, an' finally cooled 'im down. Somebody says they's Hatfield blood on his mother's side in ol' Turnbull, an' he's got to live up to it. I don't know about that. Him an' his folks went on to California six months ago."

Joad took the last of the rabbit from the wire and passed it around. He settled back and ate more slowly now, chewed evenly, and wiped the grease from his mouth with his sleeve. And his eyes, dark and half closed, brooded as he looked into the dying fire. "Ever'body's goin' west," he said. "I got me a parole to keep. Can't leave the state."

"Parole?" Muley asked. "I heard about them. How do they work?"

"Well, I got out early, three years early. They's stuff I gotta do, or they send me back in. Got to report ever' so often."

"How they treat ya there in McAlester? My woman's cousin was in McAlester an' they give him hell."

"It ain't so bad," said Joad. "Like ever'place else. They give ya hell if ya raise hell. You get along O.K. les' some guard gets it in for ya. Then you catch plenty hell. I got along O.K. Minded my own business, like any guy would. I learned to write nice as hell. Birds an' stuff like that, too; not just word writin'. My ol' man'll be sore when he sees me whip out a bird in one stroke. Pa's gonna be mad when he sees me do that. He don't like no fancy stuff like that. He don't even like word writin'. Kinda scares 'im, I guess. Ever' time Pa seen writin', somebody took somepin away from 'im."

"They didn' give you no beatin's or nothin' like that?"

"No, I jus' tended my own affairs. 'Course you get goddamn good an' sick a-doin' the same thing day after day for four years. If you done somepin you was ashamed of, you might think about that. But, hell, if I seen Herb Turnbull comin' for me with a knife right now, I'd squash him down with a shovel again."

"Anybody would," said Muley. The preacher stared into the fire, and his high forehead was white in the settling dark. The flash of little flames picked out the cords of his neck. His hands, clasped about his knees, were busy pulling knuckles.

Joad threw the last bones into the fire and licked his fingers and then wiped them on his pants. He stood up and brought the bottle of water from the porch, took a sparing drink, and passed the bottle

before he sat down again. He went on, “The thing that give me the mos’ trouble was, it didn’ make no sense. You don’t look for no sense when lightnin’ kills a cow, or it comes up a flood. That’s jus’ the way things is. But when a bunch of men take an’ lock you up four years, it ought to have some meaning. Men is supposed to think things out. Here they put me in, an’ keep me an’ feed me four years. That ought to either make me so I won’t do her again or else punish me so I’ll be afraid to do her again”—he paused—“but if Herb or anybody else come for me, I’d do her again. Do her before I could figure her out. Specially if I was drunk. That sort of senselessness kind a worries a man.”

Muley observed, “Judge says he give you a light sentence ’cause it wasn’t all your fault.”

Joad said, “They’s a guy in McAlester—lifer. He studies all the time. He’s sec’etary of the warden—writes the warden’s letters an’ stuff like that. Well, he’s one hell of a bright guy an’ reads law an’ all stuff like that. Well, I talked to him one time about her, ’cause he reads so much stuff. An’ he says it don’t do no good to read books. Says he’s read ever’thing about prisons now, an’ in the old times; an’ he says she makes less sense to him now than she did before he starts readin’. He says it’s a thing that started way to hell an’ gone back, an’ nobody seems to be able to stop her, an’ nobody got sense enough to change her. He says for God’s sake don’t read about her because he says for one thing you’ll jus’ get messed up worse, an’ for another you won’t have no respect for the guys that work the gover’ments.”

“I ain’t got a hell of a lot of respec’ for ’em now,” said Muley. “On’y kind a gover’ment we got that leans on us fellas is the ‘safe margin a profit.’ There’s one thing that got me stumped, an’ that’s Willy Feeley—drivin’ that cat’, an’ gonna be a straw boss on lan’ his own folks used to farm. That worries me. I can see how a fella might come from some other place an’ not know no better, but Willy belongs. Worried me so I went up to ’im and ast ’im. Right off he got mad. ‘I got two little kids,’ he says. ‘I got a wife an’ my wife’s mother. Them people got to eat.’ Gets madder’n hell. ‘Fust an’ on’y thing I got to think about is my own folks,’ he says. ‘What happens to other folks is their look-out,’ he says. Seems like he’s ’shamed, so he gets mad.”

Jim Casy had been staring at the dying fire, and his eyes had

grown wider and his neck muscles stood higher. Suddenly he cried, "I got her! If ever a man got a dose of the sperit, I got her! Got her all of a flash!" He jumped to his feet and paced back and forth, his head swinging. "Had a tent one time. Drawed as much as five hundred people ever' night. That's before either you fellas seen me." He stopped and faced them. "Ever notice I never took no collections when I was preachin' out here to folks—in barns an' in the open?"

"By God, you never," said Muley. "People around here got so use' to not givin' you money they got to bein' a little mad when some other preacher come along an' passed the hat. Yes, sir!"

"I took somepin to eat," said Casy. "I took a pair a pants when mine was wore out, an' a ol' pair a shoes when I was walkin' through to the groun', but it wasn't like when I had the tent. Some days there I'd take in ten or twenty dollars. Wasn't happy that-a-way, so I give her up, an' for a time I was happy. I think I got her now. I don' know if I can say her. I guess I won't try to say her—but maybe there's a place for a preacher. Maybe I can preach again. Folks out lonely on the road, folks with no lan', no home to go to. They got to have some kind of home. Maybe—" He stood over the fire. The hundred muscles of his neck stood out in high relief, and the firelight went deep into his eyes and ignited red embers. He stood and looked at the fire, his face tense as though he were listening, and the hands that had been active to pick, to handle, to throw ideas, grew quiet, and in a moment crept into his pockets. The bats flittered in and out of the dull firelight, and the soft watery burble of a night hawk came from across the fields.

Tom reached quietly into his pocket and brought out his tobacco, and he rolled a cigarette slowly and looked over it at the coals while he worked. He ignored the whole speech of the preacher, as though it were some private thing that should not be inspected. He said, "Night after night in my bunk I figgered how she'd be when I come home again. I figgered maybe Grampa or Granma'd be dead, an' maybe there'd be some new kids. Maybe Pa'd not be so tough. Maybe Ma'd set back a little an' let Rosasharn do the work. I knowed it wouldn't be the same as it was. Well, we'll sleep here I guess, an' come daylight we'll get on to Uncle John's. Leastwise I will. You think you're comin' along, Casy?"

The preacher still stood looking into the coals. He said slowly, "Yeah, I'm goin' with you. An' when your folks start out on the road

I'm goin' with them. An' where folks are on the road, I'm gonna be with them."

"You're welcome," said Joad. "Ma always favored you. Said you was a preacher to trust. Rosasharn wasn't growed up then." He turned his head. "Muley, you gonna walk on over with us?" Muley was looking toward the road over which they had come. "Think you'll come along, Muley?" Joad repeated.

"Huh? No. I don't go no place, an' I don't leave no place. See that glow over there, jerkin' up an' down? That's prob'ly the super'ntendent of this stretch a cotton. Somebody maybe seen our fire."

Tom looked. The glow of light was nearing over the hill. "We ain't doin' no harm," he said. "We'll jus' set here. We ain't doin' nothin'."

Muley cackled. "Yeah! We're doin' somepin jus' bein' here. We're trespassin'. We can't stay. They been tryin' to catch me for two months. Now you look. If that's a car comin' we go out in the cotton an' lay down. Don't have to go far. Then by God let 'em try to fin' us! Have to look up an' down ever' row. Jus' keep your head down."

Joad demanded, "What's come over you, Muley? You wasn't never no run-an'-hide fella. You was mean."

Muley watched the approaching lights. "Yeah!" he said. "I was mean like a wolf. Now I'm mean like a weasel. When you're huntin' somepin you're a hunter, an' you're strong. Can't nobody beat a hunter. But when you get hunted—that's different. Somepin happens to you. You ain't strong; maybe you're fierce, but you ain't strong. I been hunted now for a long time. I ain't a hunter no more. I'd maybe shoot a fella in the dark, but I don't maul nobody with a fence stake no more. It don't do no good to fool you or me. That's how it is."

"Well, you go out an' hide," said Joad. "Leave me an' Casy tell these bastards a few things." The beam of light was closer now, and it bounced into the sky and then disappeared, and then bounced up again. All three men watched.

Muley said, "There's one more thing about bein' hunted. You get to thinkin' about all the dangerous things. If you're huntin' you don't think about 'em, an' you ain't scared. Like you says to me, if you get in any trouble they'll sen' you back to McAlester to finish

your time."

"That's right," said Joad. "That's what they tol' me, but settin' here restin' or sleepin' on the groun'—that ain't gettin' in no trouble. That ain't doin' nothin' wrong. That ain't like gettin' drunk or raisin' hell."

Muley laughed. "You'll see. You jus' set here, an' the car'll come. Maybe it's Willy Feeley, an' Willy's a deputy sheriff now. 'What you doin' trespassin' here?' Willy says. Well, you always did know Willy was full a crap, so you says, 'What's it to you?' Willy gets mad an' says, 'You get off or I'll take you in.' An' you ain't gonna let no Feeley push you aroun' 'cause he's mad an' scared. He's made a bluff an' he got to go on with it, an' here's you gettin' tough an' you got to go through—oh, hell, it's a lot easier to lay out in the cotton an' let 'em look. It's more fun, too, 'cause they're mad an' can't do nothin', an' you're out there a-laughin' at 'em. But you jus' talk to Willy or any boss, an' you slug hell out of 'em an' they'll take you in an' run you back to McAlester for three years."

"You're talkin' sense," said Joad. "Ever' word you say is sense. But, Jesus, I hate to get pushed around! I lots rather take a sock at Willy."

"He got a gun," said Muley. "He'll use it 'cause he's a deputy. Then he either got to kill you or you got to get his gun away an' kill him. Come on, Tommy. You can easy tell yourself you're foolin' them lyin' out like that. An' it all just amounts to what you tell yourself." The strong lights angled up into the sky now, and the even drone of a motor could be heard. "Come on, Tommy. Don't have to go far, jus' fourteen-fifteen rows over, an' we can watch what they do."

Tom got to his feet. "By God, you're right!" he said. "I ain't got a thing in the worl' to win, no matter how it comes out."

"Come on, then, over this way." Muley moved around the house and out into the cotton field about fifty yards. "This is good," he said, "Now lay down. You on'y got to pull your head down if they start the spotlight goin'. It's kinda fun." The three men stretched out at full length and propped themselves on their elbows. Muley sprang up and ran toward the house, and in a few moments he came back and threw a bundle of coats and shoes down. "They'd of taken 'em along just to get even," he said. The lights topped the rise and bore down on the house.

Joad asked, “Won’t they come out here with flashlights an’ look aroun’ for us? I wisht I had a stick.”

Muley giggled. “No, they won’t. I tol’ you I’m mean like a weasel. Willy done that one night an’ I clipped ’im from behint with a fence stake. Knocked him colder’n a wedge. He tol’ later how five guys come at him.”

The car drew up to the house and a spotlight snapped on. “Duck,” said Muley. The bar of cold white light swung over their heads and crisscrossed the field. The hiding men could not see any movement, but they heard a car door slam and they heard voices. “Scairt to get in the light,” Muley whispered. “Once-twice I’ve took a shot at the headlights. That keeps Willy careful. He got somebody with ’im tonight.” They heard footsteps on wood, and then from inside the house they saw the glow of a flashlight. “Shall I shoot through the house?” Muley whispered. “They couldn’t see where it come from. Give ’em somepin to think about.”

“Sure, go ahead,” said Joad.

“Don’t do it,” Casy whispered. “It won’t do no good. Jus’ a waste. We got to get thinkin’ about doin’ stuff that means somepin.”

A scratching sound came from near the house. “Puttin’ out the fire,” Muley whispered. “Kickin’ dust over it.” The car doors slammed, the headlights swung around and faced the road again. “Now duck!” said Muley. They dropped their heads and the spotlight swept over them and crossed and recrossed the cotton field, and then the car started and slipped away and topped the rise and disappeared.

Muley sat up. “Willy always tries that las’ flash. He done it so often I can time ’im. An’ he still thinks it’s cute.”

Casy said, “Maybe they left some fellas at the house. They’d catch us when we come back.”

“Maybe. You fellas wait here. I know this game.” He walked quietly away, and only a slight crunching of clods could be heard from his passage. The two waiting men tried to hear him, but he had gone. In a moment he called from the house. “They didn’t leave nobody. Come on back.” Casey and Joad struggled up and walked back toward the black bulk of the house. Muley met them near the smoking dust pile which had been their fire. “I didn’ think they’d leave nobody,” he said proudly. “Me knockin’ Willy over an’ takin’ a shot at the lights once-twice keeps ’em careful. They ain’t sure

who it is, an' I ain't gonna let 'em catch me. I don't sleep near no house. If you fellas wanta come along, I'll show you where to sleep, where there ain't nobody gonna stumble over ya."

"Lead off," said Joad. "We'll folla you. I never thought I'd be hidin' out on my old man's place."

Muley set off across the fields, and Joad and Casy followed him. They kicked the cotton plants as they went. "You'll be hidin' from lots of stuff," said Muley. They marched in single file across the fields. They came to a water-cut and slid easily down to the bottom of it.

"By God, I bet I know," cried Joad. "Is it a cave in the bank?"

"That's right. How'd you know?"

"I dug her," said Joad. "Me an' my brother Noah dug her. Lookin' for gold we says we was, but we was jus' diggin' caves like kids always does." The walls of the water-cut were above their heads now. "Ought to be pretty close," said Joad. "Seems to me I remember her pretty close."

Muley said, "I've covered her with bresh. Nobody couldn't find her." The bottom of the gulch leveled off, and the footing was sand.

Joad settled himself on the clean sand. "I ain't gonna sleep in no cave," he said. "I'm gonna sleep right here." He rolled his coat and put it under his head.

Muley pulled at the covering brush and crawled into his cave. "I like it in here," he called. "I feel like nobody can come at me."

Jim Casy sat down on the sand beside Joad.

"Get some sleep," said Joad. "We'll start for Uncle John's at daybreak."

"I ain't sleepin'," said Casy. "I got too much to puzzle with." He drew up his feet and clasped his legs. He threw back his head and looked at the sharp stars. Joad yawned and brought one hand back under his head. They were silent, and gradually the skittering life of the ground, of holes and burrows, of the brush, began again; the gophers moved, and the rabbits crept to green things, the mice scampered over clods, and the winged hunters moved soundlessly overhead.

Chapter 7

In the towns, on the edges of the towns, in fields, in vacant lots, the used-car yards, the wreckers' yards, the garages with blazoned signs —Used Cars, Good Used Cars. Cheap transportation, three trailers. '27 Ford, clean. Checked cars, guaranteed cars. Free radio. Car with 100 gallons of gas free. Come in and look. Used Cars. No overhead.

A lot and a house large enough for a desk and chair and a blue book. Sheaf of contracts, dog-eared, held with paper clips, and a neat pile of unused contracts. Pen—keep it full, keep it working. A sale's been lost 'cause a pen didn't work.

Those sons-of-bitches over there ain't buying. Every yard gets 'em. They're lookers. Spend all their time looking. Don't want to buy no cars; take up your time. Don't give a damn for your time. Over there, them two people—no, with the kids. Get 'em in a car. Start 'em at two hundred and work down. They look good for one and a quarter. Get 'em rolling. Get 'em out in a jalopy. Sock it to 'em! They took our time.

Owners with rolled-up sleeves. Salesmen, neat, deadly, small intent eyes watching for weaknesses.

Watch the woman's face. If the woman likes it we can screw the old man. Start' em on that Cad'. Then you can work 'em down to that ' 26 Buick. 'F you start on the Buick, they'll go for a Ford. Roll up your sleeves an' get to work. This ain't gonna last forever. Show 'em that Nash while I get the slow leak pumped up on that ' 25 Dodge. I'll give you a Hymie when I'm ready.

What you want is transportation, ain't it? No baloney for you. Sure the upholstery is shot. Seat cushions ain't turning no wheels over.

Cars lined up, noses forward, rusty noses, flat tires. Parked close together.

Like to get in to see that one? Sure, no trouble. I'll pull her out of the line.

Get 'em under obligation. Make 'em take up your time. Don't let 'em forget they're takin' your time. People are nice, mostly. They hate to put you out. Make 'em put you out, an' then sock it to 'em.

Cars lined up, Model T's, high and snotty, creaking wheel, worn

bands. Buicks, Nashes, De Sotos.

Yes, sir. ' 22 Dodge. Best goddamn car Dodge ever made. Never wear out. Low compression. High compression got lots a sap for a while, but the metal ain't made that'll hold it for long. Plymouths, Rocknes, Stars.

Jesus, where'd that Apperson come from, the Ark? And a Chalmers and a Chandler—ain't made 'em for years. We ain't sellin' cars—rolling junk. Goddamn it, I got to get jalopies. I don't want nothing for more'n twenty-five, thirty bucks. Sell 'em for fifty, seventy-five. That's a good profit. Christ, what cut do you make on a new car? Get jalopies. I can sell 'em fast as I get 'em. Nothing over two hundred fifty. Jim, corral that old bastard on the sidewalk. Don't know his ass from a hole in the ground. Try him on that Apperson. Say, where is that Apperson? Sold? If we don't get some jalopies we got nothing to sell.

Flags, red and white, white and blue—all along the curb. Used Cars. Good Used Cars.

Today's bargain—up on the platform. Never sell it. Makes folks come in, though. If we sold that bargain at that price we'd hardly make a dime. Tell 'em it's jus' sold. Take out that yard battery before you make delivery. Put in that dumb cell. Christ, what they want for six bits? Roll up your sleeves—pitch in. This ain't gonna last. If I had enough jalopies I'd retire in six months.

Listen, Jim, I heard that Chevvy's rear end. Sounds like bustin' bottles. Squirt in a couple quarts of sawdust. Put some in the gears, too. We got to move that lemon for thirty-five dollars. Bastard cheated me on that one. I offer ten an' he jerks me to fifteen, an' then the son-of-a-bitch took the tools out. God Almighty! I wisht I had five hundred jalopies. This ain't gonna last. He don't like the tires? Tell 'im they got ten thousand in 'em, knock off a buck an' a half.

Piles of rusty ruins against the fence, rows of wrecks in back, fenders, grease-black wrecks, blocks lying on the ground and a pig weed growing up through the cylinders. Brake rods, exhausts, piled like snakes. Grease, gasoline.

See if you can't find a spark plug that ain't cracked. Christ, if I had fifty trailers at under a hundred I'd clean up. What the hell is he kickin' about? We sell 'em, but we don't push 'em home for him. That's good! Don't push 'em home. Get that one in the Monthly, I

bet. You don't think he's a prospect? Well, kick 'im out. We got too much to do to bother with a guy that can't make up his mind. Take the right front tire off the Graham. Turn that mended side down. The rest looks swell. Got tread an' everything.

Sure! There's fifty thousan' in that ol' heap yet. Keep plenty oil in. So long. Good luck.

Lookin' for a car? What did you have in mind? See anything attracts you? I'm dry. How about a little snort a good stuff? Come on, while your wife's lookin' at that La Salle. You don't want no La Salle. Bearings shot. Uses too much oil. Got a Lincoln '24. There's a car. Run forever. Make her into a truck.

Hot sun on rusted metal. Oil on the ground. People are wandering in, bewildered, needing a car.

Wipe your feet. Don't lean on that car, it's dirty. How do you buy a car? What does it cost? Watch the children, now. I wonder how much for this one? We'll ask. It don't cost money to ask. We can ask, can't we? Can't pay a nickel over seventy-five, or there won't be enough to get to California.

God, if I could only get a hundred jalopies. I don't care if they run or not.

Tires, used, bruised tires, stacked in tall cylinders; tubes, red, gray, hanging like sausages.

Tire patch? Radiator cleaner? Spark intensifier? Drop this little pill in your gas tank and get ten extra miles to the gallon. Just paint it on—you got a new surface for fifty cents. Wipers, fan belts, gaskets? Maybe it's the valve. Get a new valve stem. What can you lose for a nickel?

All right, Joe. You soften 'em up an' shoot 'em in here. I'll close 'em, I'll deal 'em or I'll kill 'em. Don't send in no bums. I want deals.

Yes, sir, step in. You got a buy there. Yes, sir! At eighty bucks you got a buy.

I can't go no higher than fifty. The fella outside says fifty.

Fifty. *Fifty?* He's nuts. Paid seventy-eight fifty for that little number. Joe, you crazy fool, you tryin' to bust us? Have to can that guy. I might take sixty. Now look here, mister, I ain't got all day. I'm a business man but I ain't out to stick nobody. Got anything to trade?

Got a pair of mules I'll trade.

Mules! Hey, Joe, hear this? This guy wants to trade mules. Didn't nobody tell you this is the machine age? They don't use mules for nothing but glue no more.

Fine big mules—five and seven years old. Maybe we better look around.

Look around! You come in when we're busy, an' take up our time an' then walk out! Joe, did you know you was talkin' to pikers?

I ain't a piker. I got to get a car. We're goin' to California. I got to get a car.

Well, I'm a sucker. Joe says I'm a sucker. Says if I don't quit givin' my shirt away I'll starve to death. Tell you what I'll do—I can get five bucks apiece for them mules for dog feed.

I wouldn't want them to go for dog feed.

Well, maybe I can get ten or seven maybe. Tell you what we'll do. We'll take your mules for twenty. Wagon goes with 'em, don't it? An' you put up fifty, an' you can sign a contract to send the rest at ten dollars a month.

But you said eighty.

Didn't you never hear about carrying charges and insurance? That just boosts her a little. You'll get her all paid up in four-five months. Sign your name right here. We'll take care of ever'thing.

Well, I don't know——

Now, look here. I'm givin' you my shirt, an' you took all this time. I might a made three sales while I been talkin' to you. I'm disgusted. Yeah, sign right there. All right, sir. Joe, fill up the tank for this gentleman. We'll give him gas.

Jesus, Joe, that was a hot one! What'd we give for that jalopy? Thirty bucks—thirty-five wasn't it? I got that team, an' if I can't get seventy-five for that team, I ain't a business man. An' I got fifty cash an' a contract for forty more. Oh, I know they're not all honest, but it'll surprise you how many kick through with the rest. One guy come through with a hundred two years after I wrote him off. I bet you this guy sends the money. Christ, if I could only get five hundred jalopies! Roll up your sleeves, Joe. Go out an' soften 'em, an' send 'em in to me. You get twenty on that last deal. You ain't doing bad.

Limp flags in the afternoon sun. Today's Bargain. '29 Ford pickup,

runs good.

What do you want for fifty bucks—a Zephyr?

Horsehair curling out of seat cushions, fenders battered and hammered back. Bumpers torn loose and hanging. Fancy Ford roadster with little colored lights at fender guide, at radiator cap, and three behind. Mud aprons, and a big die on the gear-shift lever. Pretty girl on tire cover, painted in color and named Cora. Afternoon sun on the dusty windshields.

Christ, I ain't had time to go out an' eat! Joe, send a kid for a hamburger.

Spattering roar of ancient engines.

There's a dumb-bunny lookin' at that Chrysler. Find out if he got any jack in his jeans. Some a these farm boys is sneaky. Soften 'em up an' roll 'em in to me, Joe. You're doin' good.

Sure, we sold it. Guarantee? We guaranteed it to be an automobile. We didn't guarantee to wet-nurse it. Now listen here, you—you bought a car, an' now you're squawkin'. I don't give a damn if you don't make payments. We ain't got your paper. We turn that over to the finance company. They'll get after you, not us. We don't hold no paper. Yeah? Well you jus' get tough an' I'll call a cop. No, we did not switch the tires. Run 'im outa here, Joe. He bought a car, an' now he ain't satisfied. How'd you think if I bought a steak an' et half an' try to bring it back? We're runnin' a business, not a charity ward. Can ya imagine that guy, Joe? Say—looka there! Got a Elk's tooth! Run over there. Let 'em glance over that '36 Pontiac. Yeah.

Square noses, round noses, rusty noses, shovel noses, and the long curves of streamlines, and the flat surfaces before streamlining. Bargains Today. Old monsters with deep upholstery—you can cut her into a truck easy. Two-wheel trailers, axles rusty in the hard afternoon sun. Used Cars. Good Used Cars. Clean, runs good. Don't pump oil.

Christ, look at 'er! Somebody took nice care of 'er.

Cadillacs, La Salles, Buicks, Plymouths, Packards, Chevvies, Fords, Pontiacs. Row on row, headlights glinting in the afternoon sun. Good Used Cars.

Soften 'em up, Joe. Jesus, I wisht I had a thousand jalopies! Get 'em ready to deal, an' I'll close 'em.

Goin’ to California? Here’s jus’ what you need. Looks shot, but they’s thousan’s of miles in her.

Lined up side by side. Good Used Cars. Bargains. Clean, runs good.

Chapter 8

The sky grayed among the stars, and the pale, late quarter-moon was insubstantial and thin. Tom Joad and the preacher walked quickly along a road that was only wheel tracks and beaten caterpillar tracks through a cotton field. Only the unbalanced sky showed the approach of dawn, no horizon to the west, and a line to the east. The two men walked in silence and smelled the dust their feet kicked into the air.

"I hope you're dead sure of the way," Jim Casy said. "I'd hate to have the dawn come and us be way to hell an' gone somewhere." The cotton field scurried with waking life, the quick flutter of morning birds feeding on the ground, the scamper over the clods of disturbed rabbits. The quiet thudding of the men's feet in the dust, the squeak of crushed clods under their shoes, sounded against the secret noises of the dawn.

Tom said, "I could shut my eyes an' walk right there. On'y way I can go wrong is think about her. Jus' forget about her, an' I'll go right there. Hell, man, I was born right aroun' in here. I run aroun' here when I was a kid. They's a tree over there—look, you can jus' make it out. Well, once my old man hung up a dead coyote in that tree. Hung there till it was all sort of melted, an' then dropped off. Dried up, like. Jesus, I hope Ma's cookin' somepin. My belly's caved."

"Me too," said Casy. "Like a little eatin' tobacca? Keeps ya from gettin' too hungry. Been better if we didn' start so damn early. Better if it was light." He paused to gnaw off a piece of plug. "I was sleepin' nice."

"That crazy Muley done it," said Tom. "He got me clear jumpy. Wakes me up an' says, ''By, Tom. I'm goin' on. I got places to go.' An' he says, 'Better get goin' too, so's you'll be offa this lan' when the light comes.' He's gettin' screwy as a gopher, livin' like he does. You'd think Injuns was after him. Think he's nuts?"

"Well, I dunno. You seen that car come las' night when we had a little fire. You seen how the house was smashed. They's somepin purty mean goin' on. 'Course Muley's crazy, all right. Creepin' aroun' like a coyote; that's boun' to make him crazy. He'll kill somebody purty soon an' they'll run him down with dogs. I can see

it like a prophecy. He'll get worse an' worse. Wouldn' come along with us, you say?"

"No," said Joad. "I think he's scared to see people now. Wonder he come up to us. We'll be at Uncle John's place by sunrise." They walked along in silence for a time, and the late owls flew over toward the barns, the hollow trees, the tank houses, where they hid from daylight. The eastern sky grew fairer and it was possible to see the cotton plants and the graying earth. "Damn' if I know how they're all sleepin' at Uncle John's. He on'y got one room an' a cookin' leanto, an' a little bit of a barn. Must be a mob there now."

The preacher said, "I don't recollect that John had a fambly. Just a lone man, ain't he? I don't recollect much about him."

"Lonest goddamn man in the world," said Joad. "Crazy kind of son-of-a-bitch, too—somepin like Muley, on'y worse in some ways. Might see 'im anywheres—at Shawnee, drunk, or visitin' a widow twenty miles away, or workin' his place with a lantern. Crazy. Ever'body thought he wouldn't live long. A lone man like that don't live long. But Uncle John's older'n Pa. Jus' gets stringier an' meaner ever' year. Meaner'n Grampa."

"Look a the light comin'," said the preacher. "Silvery-like. Didn' John never have no fambly?"

"Well, yes, he did, an' that'll show you the kind a fella he is—set in his ways. Pa tells about it. Uncle John, he had a young wife. Married four months. She was in a family way, too, an' one night she gets a pain in her stomick, an' she says, 'You better go for a doctor.' Well, John, he's settin' there, an' he says, 'You just got a stomickache. You et too much. Take a dose a pain killer. You crowd up ya stomick an' ya get a stomickache,' he says. Nex' noon she's outa her head, an' she dies at about four in the afternoon."

"What was it?" Casy asked. "Poisoned from somepin she et?"

"No, somepin jus' bust in her. Ap—appendick or somepin. Well, Uncle John, he's always been a easy-goin' fella, an' he takes it hard. Takes it for a sin. For a long time he won't have nothin' to say to nobody. Just walks aroun' like he don't see nothin', an' he prays some. Took 'im two years to come out of it, an' then he ain't the same. Sort of wild. Made a damn nuisance of hisself. Ever' time one of us kids got worms or a gutache Uncle John brings a doctor out. Pa finally tol' him he got to stop. Kids all the time gettin' a gutache. He figures it's his fault his woman died. Funny fella. He's all the

time makin' it up to somebody—givin' kids stuff, droppin' a sack a meal on somebody's porch. Give away about ever'thing he got, an' still he ain't very happy. Gets walkin' around alone at night sometimes. He's a good farmer, though. Keeps his lan' nice."

"Poor fella," said the preacher. "Poor lonely fella. Did he go to church much when his woman died?"

"No, he didn'. Never wanted to get close to folks. Wanted to be off alone. I never seen a kid that wasn't crazy about him. He'd come to our house in the night sometimes, an' we knowed he come 'cause jus' as sure as he come there'd be a pack a gum in the bed right beside ever' one of us. We thought he was Jesus Christ Awmighty."

The preacher walked along, head down. He didn't answer. And the light of the coming morning made his forehead seem to shine, and his hands, swinging beside him, flicked into the light and out again.

Tom was silent too, as though he had said too intimate a thing and was ashamed. He quickened his pace and the preacher kept step. They could see a little into gray distance ahead now. A snake wriggled slowly from the cotton rows into the road. Tom stopped short of it and peered. "Gopher snake," he said. "Let him go." They walked around the snake and went on their way. A little color came into the eastern sky, and almost immediately the lonely dawn light crept over the land. Green appeared on the cotton plants and the earth was gray-brown. The faces of the men lost their grayish shine. Joad's face seemed to darken with the growing light. "This is the good time," Joad said softly. "When I was a kid I used to get up an' walk around by myself when it was like this. What's that ahead?"

A committee of dogs had met in the road, in honor of a bitch. Five males, shepherd mongrels, collie mongrels, dogs whose breeds had been blurred by a freedom of social life, were engaged in complimenting the bitch. For each dog sniffed daintily and then stalked to a cotton plant on stiff legs, raised a hind foot ceremoniously and wetted, then went back to smell. Joad and the preacher stopped to watch, and suddenly Joad laughed joyously. "By God!" he said. "By God!" Now all dogs met and hackles rose, and they all growled and stood stiffly, each waiting for the others to start a fight. One dog mounted and, now that it was accomplished, the others gave way and watched with interest, and their tongues were out, and their tongues dripped. The two men walked on. "By

God!" Joad said. "I think that up-dog is our Flash. I thought he'd be dead. Come, Flash!" He laughed again. "What the hell, if somebody called me, I wouldn't hear him neither. 'Minds me of a story they tell about Willy Feeley when he was a young fella. Willy was bashful, awful bashful. Well, one day he takes a heifer over to Graves' bull. Ever'body was out but Elsie Graves, and Elsie wasn't bashful at all. Willy, he stood there turnin' red an' he couldn't even talk. Elsie says, 'I know what you come for; the bull's out in back a the barn.' Well, they took the heifer out there an' Willy an' Elsie sat on the fence to watch. Purty soon Willy got feelin' purty fly. Elsie looks over an' says, like she don't know, 'What's a matter, Willy?' Willy's so randy he can't hardly set still. 'By God,' he says, 'by God, I wisht I was a-doin' that!' Elsie says, 'Why not, Willy? It's your heifer.'"

The preacher laughed softly. "You know," he said, "it's a nice thing not bein' a preacher no more. Nobody use' ta tell stories when I was there, or if they did I couldn' laugh. An' I couldn' cuss. Now I cuss all I want, any time I want, an' it does a fella good to cuss if he wants to."

A redness grew up out of the eastern horizon, and on the ground birds began to chirp, sharply. "Look!" said Joad. "Right ahead. That's Uncle John's tank. Can't see the win'mill, but there's his tank. See it against the sky?" He speeded his walk. "I wonder if all the folks are there." The hulk of the tank stood above a rise. Joad, hurrying, raised a cloud of dust about his knees. "I wonder if Ma —" They saw the tank legs now, and the house, a square little box, unpainted and bare, and the barn, low-roofed and huddled. Smoke was rising from the tin chimney of the house. In the yard was a litter, piled furniture, the blades and motor of the windmill, bedsteads, chairs, tables. "Holy Christ, they're fixin' to go!" Joad said. A truck stood in the yard, a truck with high sides, but a strange truck, for while the front of it was a sedan, the top had been cut off in the middle and the truck bed fitted on. And as they drew near, the men could hear pounding from the yard, and as the rim of the blinding sun came up over the horizon, it fell on the truck, and they saw a man and the flash of his hammer as it rose and fell. And the sun flashed on the windows of the house. The weathered boards were bright. Two red chickens on the ground flamed with reflected light.

“Don’t yell,” said Tom. “Let’s creep up on ’em, like,” and he walked so fast that the dust rose as high as his waist. And then he came to the edge of the cotton field. Now they were in the yard proper, earth beaten hard, shiny hard, and a few dusty crawling weeds on the ground. And Joad slowed as though he feared to go on. The preacher, watching him, slowed to match his step. Tom sauntered forward, sidled embarrassedly toward the truck. It was a Hudson Super-Six sedan, and the top had been ripped in two with a cold chisel. Old Tom Joad stood in the truck bed and he was nailing on the top rails of the truck sides. His grizzled, bearded face was low over his work, and a bunch of six-penny nails stuck out of his mouth. He set a nail and his hammer thundered it in. From the house came the clash of a lid on the stove and the wail of a child. Joad sidled up to the truck bed and leaned against it. And his father looked at him and did not see him. His father set another nail and drove it in. A flock of pigeons started from the deck of the tank house and flew around and settled again and strutted to the edge to look over; white pigeons and blue pigeons and grays, with iridescent wings.

Joad hooked his fingers over the lowest bar of the truck side. He looked up at the aging, graying man on the truck. He wet his thick lips with his tongue, and he said softly, “Pa.”

“What do you want?” old Tom mumbled around his mouthful of nails. He wore a black, dirty slouch hat and a blue work shirt over which was a buttonless vest; his jeans were held up by a wide harness-leather belt with a big square brass buckle, leather and metal polished from years of wearing; and his shoes were cracked and the soles swollen and boat-shaped from years of sun and wet and dust. The sleeves of his shirt were tight on his forearms, held down by the bulging powerful muscles. Stomach and hips were lean, and legs, short, heavy, and strong. His face, squared by a bristling pepper and salt beard, was all drawn down to the forceful chin, a chin thrust out and built out by the stubble beard which was not so grayed on the chin, and gave weight and force to its thrust. Over old Tom’s unwhiskered cheek bones the skin was as brown as meerschaum, and wrinkled in rays around his eye-corners from squinting. His eyes were brown, black-coffee brown, and he thrust his head forward when he looked at a thing, for his bright dark eyes were failing. His lips, from which the big nails protruded, were thin and red.

He held his hammer suspended in the air, about to drive a set nail, and he looked over the truck side at Tom, looked resentful at being interrupted. And then his chin drove forward and his eyes looked at Tom's face, and then gradually his brain became aware of what he saw. The hammer dropped slowly to his side, and with his left hand he took the nails from his mouth. And he said wonderingly, as though he told himself the fact, "It's Tommy—" And then, still informing himself, "It's Tommy come home." His mouth opened again, and a look of fear came into his eyes. "Tommy," he said softly, "you ain't busted out? You ain't got to hide?" He listened tensely.

"Naw," said Tom. "I'm paroled. I'm free. I got my papers." He gripped the lower bars of the truck side and looked up.

Old Tom laid his hammer gently on the floor and put his nails in his pocket. He swung his leg over the side and dropped lithely to the ground, but once beside his son he seemed embarrassed and strange. "Tommy," he said, "we are goin' to California. But we was gonna write you a letter an' tell you." And he said, incredulously, "But you're back. You can go with us. You can go!" The lid of a coffee pot slammed in the house. Old Tom looked over his shoulder. "Le's supprise 'em," he said, and his eyes shone with excitement. "Your ma got a bad feelin' she ain't never gonna see you no more. She got that quiet look like when somebody died. Almost she don't want to go to California, fear she'll never see you no more." A stove lid clashed in the house again. "Le's supprise 'em," old Tom repeated. "Le's go in like you never been away. Le's jus' see what your ma says." At last he touched Tom, but touched him on the shoulder, timidly, and instantly took his hand away. He looked at Jim Casy.

Tom said, "You remember the preacher, Pa. He come along with me."

"He been in prison too?"

"No, I met 'im on the road. He been away."

Pa shook hands gravely. "You're welcome here, sir."

Casy said, "Glad to be here. It's a thing to see when a boy comes home. It's a thing to see."

"Home," Pa said.

"To his folks," the preacher amended quickly. "We stayed at the

other place last night."

Pa's chin thrust out, and he looked back down the road for a moment. Then he turned to Tom. "How'll we do her?" he began excitedly. "S'pose I go in an' say, 'Here's some fellas want some breakfast,' or how'd it be if you jus' come in an' stood there till she seen you? How'd that be?" His face was alive with excitement.

"Don't le's give her no shock," said Tom. "Don't le's scare her none."

Two rangy shepherd dogs trotted up pleasantly, until they caught the scent of strangers, and then they backed cautiously away, watchful, their tails moving slowly and tentatively in the air, but their eyes and noses quick for animosity or danger. One of them, stretching his neck, edged forward, ready to run, and little by little he approached Tom's legs and sniffed loudly at them. Then he backed away and watched Pa for some kind of signal. The other pup was not so brave. He looked about for something that could honorably divert his attention, saw a red chicken go mincing by, and ran at it. There was the squawk of an outraged hen, a burst of red feathers, and the hen ran off, flapping stubby wings for speed. The pup looked proudly back at the men, and then flopped down in the dust and beat its tail contentedly on the ground.

"Come on," said Pa, "come on in now. She got to see you. I got to see her face when she sees you. Come on. She'll yell breakfast in a minute. I heard her slap the salt pork in the pan a good time ago." He led the way across the fine-dusted ground. There was no porch on this house, just a step and then the door; a chopping block beside the door, its surface matted and soft from years of chopping. The graining in the sheathing wood was high, for the dust had cut down the softer wood. The smell of burning willow was in the air, and, as the three men neared the door, the smell of frying side-meat and the smell of high brown biscuits and the sharp smell of coffee rolling in the pot. Pa stepped up into the open doorway and stood there blocking it with his wide short body. He said, "Ma, there's a coupla fellas jus' come along the road, an' they wonder if we could spare a bite."

Tom heard his mother's voice, the remembered cool, calm drawl, friendly and humble. "Let 'em come," she said. "We got a'plenty. Tell 'em they got to wash their han's. The bread is done. I'm jus' takin' up the side-meat now." And the sizzle of the angry grease

came from the stove.

Pa stepped inside, clearing the door, and Tom looked in at his mother. She was lifting the curling slices of pork from the frying pan. The oven door was open, and a great pan of high brown biscuits stood waiting there. She looked out the door, but the sun was behind Tom, and she saw only a dark figure outlined by the bright yellow sunlight. She nodded pleasantly. “Come in,” she said. “Jus’ lucky I made plenty bread this morning.”

Tom stood looking in. Ma was heavy, but not fat; thick with childbearing and work. She wore a loose Mother Hubbard of gray cloth in which there had once been colored flowers, but the color was washed out now, so that the small flowered pattern was only a little lighter gray than the background. The dress came down to her ankles, and her strong, broad, bare feet moved quickly and deftly over the floor. Her thin, steel-gray hair was gathered in a sparse wispy knot at the back of her head. Strong, freckled arms were bare to the elbow, and her hands were chubby and delicate, like those of a plump little girl. She looked out into the sunshine. Her full face was not soft; it was controlled, kindly. Her hazel eyes seemed to have experienced all possible tragedy and to have mounted pain and suffering like steps into a high calm and a superhuman understanding. She seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken. And since old Tom and the children could not know hurt or fear unless she acknowledged hurt and fear, she had practiced denying them in herself. And since, when a joyful thing happened, they looked to see whether joy was on her, it was her habit to build up laughter out of inadequate materials. But better than joy was calm. Imperturbability could be depended upon. And from her great and humble position in the family she had taken dignity and a clean calm beauty. From her position as healer, her hands had grown sure and cool and quiet; from her position as arbiter she had become as remote and faultless in judgment as a goddess. She seemed to know that if she swayed the family shook, and if she ever really deeply wavered or despaired the family would fall, the family will to function would be gone.

She looked out into the sunny yard, at the dark figure of a man. Pa stood near by, shaking with excitement. “Come in,” he cried. “Come right in, mister.” And Tom a little shame-facedly stepped

over the doorsill.

She looked up pleasantly from the frying pan. And then her hand sank slowly to her side and the fork clattered to the wooden floor. Her eyes opened wide, and the pupils dilated. She breathed heavily through her open mouth. She closed her eyes. “Thank God,” she said. “Oh, thank God!” And suddenly her face was worried. “Tommy, you ain’t wanted? You didn’ bust loose?”

“No, Ma. Parole. I got the papers here.” He touched his breast.

She moved toward him lithely, soundlessly in her bare feet, and her face was full of wonder. Her small hand felt his arm, felt the soundness of his muscles. And then her fingers went up to his cheek as a blind man’s fingers might. And her joy was nearly like sorrow. Tom pulled his underlip between his teeth and bit it. Her eyes went wonderingly to his bitten lip, and she saw the little line of blood against his teeth and the trickle of blood down his lip. Then she knew, and her control came back, and her hand dropped. Her breath came out explosively. “Well!” she cried. “We come mighty near to goin’ without ya. An’ we was wonderin’ how in the worl’ you could ever find us.” She picked up the fork and combed the boiling grease and brought out a dark curl of crisp pork. And she set the pot of tumbling coffee on the back of the stove.

Old Tom giggled, “Fooled ya, huh, Ma? We aimed to fool ya, and we done it. Jus’ stood there like a hammered sheep. Wisht Grampa’d been here to see. Looked like somebody’d beat ya between the eyes with a sledge. Grampa would a whacked ’imself so hard he’d a throwed his hip out—like he done when he seen Al take a shot at that grea’ big airship the army got. Tommy, it come over one day, half a mile big, an’ Al gets the thirty-thirty and blazes away at her. Grampa yells, ‘Don’t shoot no fledglin’s, Al; wait till a growed-up one goes over,’ an’ then he whacked ’imself an’ throwed his hip out.”

Ma chuckled and took down a heap of tin plates from a shelf.

Tom asked, “Where is Grampa? I ain’t seen the ol’ devil.”

Ma stacked the plates on the kitchen table and piled cups beside them. She said confidentially, “Oh, him an’ Granma sleeps in the barn. They got to get up so much in the night. They was stumblin’ over the little fellas.”

Pa broke in, “Yeah, ever’ night Grampa’d get mad. Tumble over Winfield, an’ Winfield’d yell, an’ Grampa’d get mad an’ wet his

drawers, an' that'd make him madder, an' purty soon ever'body in the house'd be yellin' their head off." His words tumbled out between chuckles. "Oh, we had lively times. One night when ever'body was yellin' an' a-cussin', your brother Al, he's a smart aleck now, he says, 'Goddamn it, Grampa, why don't you run off an' be a pirate?' Well, that made Grampa so goddamn mad he went for his gun. Al had ta sleep out in the fiel' that night. But now Granma an' Grampa both sleeps in the barn."

Ma said, "They can jus' get up an' step outside when they feel like it. Pa, run on out an' tell 'em Tommy's home. Grampa's a favorite of him."

"A course," said Pa. "I should of did it before." He went out the door and crossed the yard, swinging his hands high.

Tom watched him go, and then his mother's voice called his attention. She was pouring coffee. She did not look at him. "Tommy," she said hesitantly, timidly.

"Yeah?" His timidity was set off by hers, a curious embarrassment. Each one knew the other was shy, and became more shy in the knowledge.

"Tommy, I got to ask you—you ain't mad?"

"Mad, Ma?"

"You ain't poisoned mad? You don't hate nobody? They didn' do nothin' in that jail to rot you out with crazy mad?"

He looked sidewise at her, studied her, and his eyes seemed to ask how she could know such things. "No-o-o," he said. "I was for a little while. But I ain't proud like some fellas. I let stuff run off'n me. What's a matter, Ma?"

Now she was looking at him, her mouth open, as though to hear better, her eyes digging to know better. Her face looked for the answer that is always concealed in language. She said in confusion, "I knowed Purty Boy Floyd. I knowed his ma. They was good folks. He was full a hell, sure, like a good boy oughta be." She paused and then her words poured out. "I don' know all like this—but I know it. He done a little bad thing a' they hurt 'im, caught 'im an' hurt him so he was mad, an' the nex' bad thing he done was mad, an' they hurt 'im again. An' purty soon he was meanmad. They shot at him like a varmint, an' he shot back, an' then they run him like a coyote, an' him a-snappin' an' a-snarlin', mean as a lobo. An' he was

mad. He wasn't no boy or no man no more, he was jus' a walkin' chunk a mean-mad. But the folks that knowed him didn' hurt 'im. He wasn' mad at them. Finally they run him down an' killed 'im. No matter how they say it in the paper how he was bad—that's how it was." She paused and she licked her dry lips, and her whole face was an aching question. "I got to know, Tommy. Did they hurt you so much? Did they make you mad like that?"

Tom's heavy lips were pulled tight over his teeth. He looked down at his big flat hands. "No," he said. "I ain't like that." He paused and studied the broken nails, which were ridged like clam shells. "All the time in stir I kep' away from stuff like that. I ain' so mad."

She sighed, "Thank God!" under her breath.

He looked up quickly. "Ma, when I seen what they done to our house——"

She came near to him then, and stood close; and she said passionately, "Tommy, don't you go fight in' 'em alone. They'll hunt you down like a coyote. Tommy, I got to thinkin' an' dreamin' an' wonderin'. They say there's a hun'erd thousand of us shoved out. If we was all mad the same way, Tommy—they wouldn't hunt nobody down —" She stopped.

Tommy, looking at her, gradually drooped his eyelids, until just a short glitter showed through his lashes. "Many folks feel that way?" he demanded.

"I don't know. They're jus' kinda stunned. Walk aroun' like they was half asleep."

From outside and across the yard came an ancient creaking bleat. "Pu-raise Gawd fur vittory! Pu-raise Gawd fur vittory!"

Tom turned his head and grinned. "Granma finally heard I'm home. Ma," he said, "you never was like this before!"

Her face hardened and her eyes grew cold. "I never had my house pushed over," she said. "I never had my fambly stuck out on the road. I never had to sell—ever'thing—Here they come now." She moved back to the stove and dumped the big pan of bulbous biscuits on two tin plates. She shook flour into the deep grease to make gravy, and her hand was white with flour. For a moment Tom watched her, and then he went to the door.

Across the yard came four people. Grampa was ahead, a lean,

ragged, quick old man, jumping with quick steps and favoring his right leg—the side that came out of joint. He was buttoning his fly as he came, and his old hands were having trouble finding the buttons, for he had buttoned the top button into the second buttonhole, and that threw the whole sequence off. He wore dark ragged pants and a torn blue shirt, open all the way down, and showing long gray underwear, also unbuttoned. His lean white chest, fuzzed with white hair, was visible through the opening in his underwear. He gave up the fly and left it open and fumbled with the underwear buttons, then gave the whole thing up and hitched his brown suspenders. His was a lean excitable face with little bright eyes as evil as a frantic child's eyes. A cantankerous, complaining, mischievous, laughing face. He fought and argued, told dirty stories. He was as lecherous as always. Vicious and cruel and impatient, like a frantic child, and the whole structure overlaid with amusement. He drank too much when he could get it, ate too much when it was there, talked too much all the time.

Behind him hobbled Granma, who had survived only because she was as mean as her husband. She had held her own with a shrill ferocious religiosity that was as lecherous and as savage as anything Grampa could offer. Once, after a meeting, while she was still speaking in tongues, she fired both barrels of a shotgun at her husband, ripping one of his buttocks nearly off, and after that he admired her and did not try to torture her as children torture bugs. As she walked she hiked her Mother Hubbard up to her knees, and she bleated her shrill terrible war cry: "Pu-raise Gawd fur vittory."

Granma and Grampa raced each other to get across the broad yard. They fought over everything, and loved and needed the fighting.

Behind them, moving slowly and evenly, but keeping up, came Pa and Noah—Noah the first-born, tall and strange, walking always with a wondering look on his face, calm and puzzled. He had never been angry in his life. He looked in wonder at angry people, wonder and uneasiness, as normal people look at the insane. Noah moved slowly, spoke seldom, and then so slowly that people who did not know him often thought him stupid. He was not stupid, but he was strange. He had little pride, no sexual urges. He worked and slept in a curious rhythm that nevertheless sufficed him. He was fond of his folks, but never showed it in any way. Although an observer could

not have told why, Noah left the impression of being misshapen, his head or his body or his legs or his mind; but no misshapen member could be recalled. Pa thought he knew why Noah was strange, but Pa was ashamed, and never told. For on the night when Noah was born, Pa, frightened at the spreading thighs, alone in the house, and horrified at the screaming wretch his wife had become, went mad with apprehension. Using his hands, his strong fingers for forceps, he had pulled and twisted the baby. The midwife, arriving late, had found the baby's head pulled out of shape, its neck stretched, its body warped; and she had pushed the head back and molded the body with her hands. But Pa always remembered, and was ashamed. And he was kinder to Noah than to the others. In Noah's broad face, eyes too far apart, and long fragile jaw, Pa thought he saw the twisted, warped skull of the baby. Noah could do all that was required of him, could read and write, could work and figure, but he didn't seem to care; there was a listlessness in him toward things people wanted and needed. He lived in a strange silent house and looked out of it through calm eyes. He was a stranger to all the world, but he was not lonely.

The four came across the yard, and Grampa demanded, "Where is he? Goddamn it, where is he?" And his fingers fumbled for his pants button, and forgot and strayed into his pocket. And then he saw Tom standing in the door. Grampa stopped and he stopped the others. His little eyes glittered with malice. "Lookut him," he said. "A jailbird. Ain't been no Joads in jail for a hell of a time." His mind jumped. "Got no right to put 'im in jail. He done just what I'd do. Sons-a-bitches got no right." His mind jumped again. "An' ol' Turnbull, stinkin' skunk, braggin' how he'll shoot ya when ya come out. Says he got Hatfield blood. Well, I sent word to him. I says, 'Don't mess around with no Joad. Maybe I got McCoy blood for all I know.' I says, 'You lay your sights anywheres near Tommy an' I'll take it an' I'll ram it up your ass,' I says. Scairt 'im, too."

Granma, not following the conversation, bleated, "Pu-raise Gawd fur vittory."

Grampa walked up and slapped Tom on the chest, and his eyes grinned with affection and pride. "How are ya, Tommy?"

"O.K." said Tom. "How ya keepin' yaself ?"

"Full a piss an' vinegar," said Grampa. His mind jumped. "Jus' like I said, they ain't a gonna keep no Joad in jail. I says, 'Tommy'll

come a-bustin' outa that jail like a bull through a corral fence.' An' you done it. Get outa my way, I'm hungry." He crowded past, sat down, loaded his plate with pork and two big biscuits and poured the thick gravy over the whole mess, and before the others could get in, Grampa's mouth was full.

Tom grinned affectionately at him. "Ain't he a heller?" he said. And Grampa's mouth was so full that he couldn't even splutter, but his mean little eyes smiled, and he nodded his head violently.

Granma said proudly, "A wicketer, cussin'er man never lived. He's goin' to hell on a poker, praise Gawd! Wants to drive the truck!" she said spitefully. "Well, he ain't goin' ta."

Grampa choked, and a mouthful of paste sprayed into his lap, and he coughed weakly.

Granma smiled up at Tom. "Messy, ain't he?" she observed brightly.

Noah stood on the step, and he faced Tom, and his wideset eyes seemed to look around him. His face had little expression. Tom said, "How ya, Noah?"

"Fine," said Noah. "How a' you?" That was all, but it was a comfortable thing.

Ma waved the flies away from the bowl of gravy. "We ain't got room to set down," she said. "Jus' get yaself a plate an' set down wherever ya can. Out in the yard or someplace."

Suddenly Tom said, "Hey! Where's the preacher? He was right here. Where'd he go?"

Pa said, "I seen him, but he's gone."

And Granma raised a shrill voice, "Preacher? You got a preacher? Go git him. We'll have a grace." She pointed at Grampa. "Too late for him—he's et. Go git the preacher."

Tom stepped out on the porch. "Hey, Jim! Jim Casy!" he called. He walked out in the yard. "Oh, Casy!" The preacher emerged from under the tank, sat up, and then stood up and moved toward the house. Tom asked, "What was you doin', hidin'?"

"Well, no. But a fella shouldn' butt his head in where a fambly got fambly stuff. I was jus' settin' a-thinkin'."

"Come on in an' eat," said Tom. "Granma wants a grace."

"But I ain't a preacher no more," Casy protested.

“Aw, come on. Give her a grace. Don’t do you no harm, an’ she likes ’em.” They walked into the kitchen together.

Ma said quietly, “You’re welcome.”

And Pa said, “You’re welcome. Have some breakfast.”

“Grace fust,” Granma clamored. “Grace fust.”

Grampa focused his eyes fiercely until he recognized Casy. “Oh, that preacher,” he said. “Oh, he’s all right. I always liked him since I seen him —” He winked so lecherously that Granma thought he had spoken and retorted, “Shut up, you sinful ol’ goat.”

Casy ran his fingers through his hair nervously. “I got to tell you, I ain’t a preacher no more. If me jus’ bein’ glad to be here an’ bein’ thankful for people that’s kind and generous, if that’s enough—why, I’ll say that kinda grace. But I ain’t a preacher no more.”

“Say her,” said Granma. “An’ get in a word about us goin’ to California.” The preacher bowed his head, and the others bowed their heads. Ma folded her hands over her stomach and bowed her head. Granma bowed so low that her nose was nearly in her plate of biscuit and gravy. Tom, leaning against the wall, a plate in his hand, bowed stiffly, and Grampa bowed his head sidewise, so that he could keep one mean and merry eye on the preacher. And on the preacher’s face there was a look not of prayer, but of thought; and in his tone not supplication, but conjecture.

“I been thinkin’,” he said. “I been in the hills, thinkin’, almost you might say like Jesus went into the wilderness to think His way out of a mess of troubles.”

“Pu-raise Gawd!” Granma said, and the preacher glanced over at her in surprise.

“Seems like Jesus got all messed up with troubles, and He couldn’t figure nothin’ out, an’ He got to feelin’ what the hell good is it all, an’ what’s the use fightin’ an’figurin’. Got tired, got good an’ tired, an’ His sperit all wore out. Jus’ about come to the conclusion, the hell with it. An’ so He went off into the wilderness.”

“A—men,” Granma bleated. So many years she had timed her responses to the pauses. And it was so many years since she had listened to or wondered at the words used.

“I ain’t sayin’ I’m like Jesus,” the preacher went on. “But I got tired like Him, an’ I got mixed up like Him, an’ I went into the wilderness like Him, without no campin’ stuff. Nighttime I’d lay on

my back an' look up at the stars; morning I'd set an' watch the sun come up; midday I'd look out from a hill at the rollin' dry country; evenin' I'd foller the sun down. Sometimes I'd pray like I always done. On'y I couldn' figure what I was prayin' to or for. There was the hills, an' there was me, an' we wasn't separate no more. We was one thing. An' that one thing was holy."

"Hallelujah," said Granma, and she rocked a little, back and forth, trying to catch hold of an ecstasy.

"An' I got thinkin', on'y it wasn't thinkin', it was deeper down than thinkin'. I got thinkin' how we was holy when we was one thing, an' mankin' was holy when it was one thing. An' it on'y got unholy when one mis'able little fella got the bit in his teeth an' run off his own way, kickin' an' draggin' an'fightin'. Fella like that bust the holiness. But when they're all workin' together, not one fella for another fella, but one fella kind of harnessed to the whole shebang —that's right, that's holy. An' then I got thinkin' I don't even know what I mean by holy." He paused, but the bowed heads stayed down, for they had been trained like dogs to rise at the "amen" signal. "I can't say no grace like I use' ta say. I'm glad of the holiness of breakfast. I'm glad there's love here. That's all." The heads stayed down. The preacher looked around. "I've got your breakfast cold," he said; and then he remembered. "Amen," he said, and all the heads rose up.

"A—men," said Granma, and she fell to her breakfast, and broke down the soggy biscuits with her hard old toothless gums. Tom ate quickly, and Pa crammed his mouth. There was no talk until the food was gone, the coffee drunk; only the crunch of chewed food and the slup of coffee cooled in transit to the tongue. Ma watched the preacher as he ate, and her eyes were questioning, probing and understanding. She watched him as though he were suddenly a spirit, not human any more, a voice out of the ground.

The men finished and put down their plates, and drained the last of their coffee; and then the men went out, Pa and the preacher and Noah and Grampa and Tom, and they walked over to the truck, avoiding the litter of furniture, the wooden bedsteads, the windmill machinery, the old plow. They walked to the truck and stood beside it. They touched the new pine side-boards.

Tom opened the hood and looked at the big greasy engine. And Pa came up beside him. He said, "Your brother Al looked her over

before we bought her. He says she's all right."

"What's he know? He's just a squirt," said Tom.

"He worked for a company. Drove truck last year. He knows quite a little. Smart aleck like he is. He knows. He can tinker an engine, Al can."

Tom asked, "Where's he now?"

"Well," said Pa, "he's a-billygoatin' aroun' the country. Tom-cattin' hisself to death. Smart-aleck sixteen-year-older, an' his nuts is just a-eggin' him on. He don't think of nothin' but girls and engines. A plain smart aleck. Ain't been in nights for a week."

Grampa, fumbling with his chest, had succeeded in buttoning the buttons of his blue shirt into the buttonholes of his underwear. His fingers felt that something was wrong, but did not care enough to find out. His fingers went down to try to figure out the intricacies of the buttoning of his fly. "I was worse," he said happily. "I was much worse. I was a heller, you might say. Why, they was a camp meetin' right in Sallisaw when I was a young fella a little bit older'n Al. He's just a squirt, an' punkin-soft. But I was older. An' we was to this here camp meetin'. Five hunderd folks there, an' a proper sprinklin' of young heifers."

"You look like a heller yet, Grampa," said Tom.

"Well, I am, kinda. But I ain't nowheres near the fella I was. Jus' let me get out to California where I can pick me an orange when I want it. Or grapes. There's a thing I ain't never had enough of. Gonna get me a whole big bunch a grapes off a bush, or whatever, an' I'm gonna squash 'em on my face an' let 'em run offen my chin."

Tom asked, "Where's Uncle John? Where's Rosasharn? Where's Ruthie an' Winfield? Nobody said nothin' about them yet."

Pa said, "Nobody asked. John gone to Sallisaw with a load a stuff to sell: pump, tools, chickens, an' all the stuff we brung over. Took Ruthie an' Winfield with 'im. Went 'fore daylight."

"Funny I never saw him," said Tom.

"Well, you come down from the highway, didn' you? He took the back way, by Cowlington. An' Rosasharn, she's nestin' with Connie's folks. By God! You don't even know Rosasharn's married to Connie Rivers. You 'member Connie. Nice young fella. An' Rosasharn's due 'bout three-four-five months now. Swellin' up right now. Looks fine."

“Jesus!” said Tom. “Rosasharn was just a little kid. An’ now she’s gonna have a baby. So damn much happens in four years if you’re away. When ya think to start out west, Pa?”

“Well, we got to take this stuff in an’ sell it. If Al gets back from his squirtin’ aroun’, I figgered he could load the truck an’ take all of it in, an’ maybe we could start out tomorra or day after. We ain’t got so much money, an’ a fella says it’s damn near two thousan’ miles to California. Quicker we get started, surer it is we get there. Money’s a-dribblin’ out all the time. You got any money?”

“On’y a couple dollars. How’d you get money?”

“Well,” said Pa, “we sol’ all the stuff at our place, an’ the whole bunch of us chopped cotton, even Grampa.”

“Sure did,” said Grampa.

“We put ever’thing together—two hundred dollars. We give seventy-five for this here truck, an’ me an’ Al cut her in two an’ built on this here back. Al was gonna grind the valves, but he’s too busy messin’ aroun’ to get down to her. We’ll have maybe a hunderd an’ fifty when we start. Damn ol’ tires on this here truck ain’t gonna go far. Got a couple of wore out spares. Pick stuff up along the road, I guess.”

The sun, driving straight down, stung with its rays. The shadows of the truck bed were dark bars on the ground, and the truck smelled of hot oil and oilcloth and paint. The few chickens had left the yard to hide in the tool shed from the sun. In the sty the pigs lay panting, close to the fence where a thin shadow fell, and they complained shrilly now and then. The two dogs were stretched in the red dust under the truck, panting, their dripping tongues covered with dust. Pa pulled his hat low over his eyes and squatted down on his hams. And, as though this were his natural position of thought and observation, he surveyed Tom critically, the new but aging cap, the suit, and the new shoes.

“Did you spen’ your money for them clothes?” he asked. “Them clothes are jus’ gonna be a nuisance to ya.”

“They give ’em to me,” said Tom. “When I come out they give ’em to me.” He took off his cap and looked at it with some admiration, then wiped his forehead with it and put it on rakishly and pulled at the visor.

Pa observed, “Them’s a nice-lookin’ pair a shoes they give ya.”

“Yeah,” Joad agreed. “Purty for nice, but they ain’t no shoes to go walkin’ aroun’ in on a hot day.” He squatted beside his father.

Noah said slowly, “Maybe if you got them side-boards all true on, we could load up this stuff. Load her up so maybe if Al comes in ____”

“I can drive her, if that’s what you want,” Tom said. “I drove truck at McAlester.”

“Good,” said Pa, and then his eyes stared down the road. “If I ain’t mistaken, there’s a young smart aleck draggin’ his tail home right now,” he said. “Looks purty wore out, too.”

Tom and the preacher looked up the road. And randy Al, seeing he was being noticed, threw back his shoulders, and he came into the yard with a swaying strut like that of a rooster about to crow. Cockily, he walked close before he recognized Tom; and when he did, his boasting face changed, and admiration and veneration shone in his eyes, and his swagger fell away. His stiff jeans, with the bottoms turned up eight inches to show his heeled boots, his three-inch belt with copper figures on it, even the red arm bands on his blue shirt and the rakish angle of his Stetson hat could not build him up to his brother’s stature; for his brother had killed a man, and no one would ever forget it. Al knew that even he had inspired some admiration among boys of his own age because his brother had killed a man. He had heard in Sallisaw how he was pointed out: “That’s Al Joad. His brother killed a fella with a shovel.”

And now Al, moving humbly near, saw that his brother was not a swaggerer as he had supposed. Al saw the dark brooding eyes of his brother, and the prison calm, the smooth hard face trained to indicate nothing to a prison guard, neither resistance nor slavishness. And instantly Al changed. Unconsciously he became like his brother, and his handsome face brooded, and his shoulders relaxed. He hadn’t remembered how Tom was.

Tom said, “Hello, Al. Jesus, you’re growin’ like a bean! I wouldn’t of knowed you.”

Al, his hand ready if Tom should want to shake it, grinned selfconsciously. Tom stuck out his hand and Al’s hand jerked out to meet it. And there was liking between these two. “They tell me you’re a good hand with a truck,” said Tom.

And Al, sensing that his brother would not like a boaster, said, “I don’t know nothin’ much about it.”

Pa said, “Been smart-alecking aroun’ the country. You look wore out. Well, you got to take a load of stuff into Sallisaw to sell.”

Al looked at his brother Tom. “Care to ride in?” he said as casually as he could.

“No, I can’t,” said Tom. “I’ll help aroun’ here. We’ll be—together on the road.”

Al tried to control his question. “Did—did you bust out? Of jail?”

“No,” said Tom. “I got paroled.”

“Oh.” And Al was a little disappointed.

Chapter 9

In the little houses the tenant people sifted their belongings and the belongings of their fathers and of their grandfathers. Picked over their possessions for the journey to the west. The men were ruthless because the past had been spoiled, but the women knew how the past would cry to them in the coming days. The men went into the barns and the sheds.

That plow, that harrow, remember in the war we planted mustard? Remember a fella wanted us to put in that rubber bush they call guayule? Get rich, he said. Bring out those tools—get a few dollars for them. Eighteen dollars for that plow, plus freight—Sears Roebuck.

Harness, carts, seeders, little bundles of hoes. Bring 'em out. Pile 'em up. Load 'em in the wagon. Take 'em to town. Sell 'em for what you can get. Sell the team and the wagon, too. No more use for anything.

Fifty cents isn't enough to get for a good plow. That seeder cost thirty-eight dollars. Two dollars isn't enough. Can't haul it all back—Well, take it, and a bitterness with it. Take the well pump and the harness. Take halters, collars, hames, and tugs. Take the little glass brow-band jewels, roses red under glass. Got those for the bay gelding. 'Member how he lifted his feet when he trotted?

Junk piled up in a yard.

Can't sell a hand plow any more. Fifty cents for the weight of the metal. Disks and tractors, that's the stuff now.

Well, take it—all junk—and give me five dollars. You're not buying only junk, you're buying junked lives. And more—you'll see—you're buying bitterness. Buying a plow to plow your own children under, buying the arms and spirits that might have saved you. Five dollars, not four. I can't haul 'em back—Well, take 'em for four. But I warn you, you're buying what will plow your own children under. And you won't see. You can't see. Take 'em for four. Now, what'll you give for the team and wagon? Those fine bays, matched they are, matched in color, matched the way they walk, stride to stride. In the stiff pull—straining hams and buttocks, split-second timed together. And in the morning, the light on them, bay light. They look over the fence sniffing for us, and the stiff ears

swivel to hear us, and the black forelocks! I've got a girl. She likes to braid the manes and forelocks, puts little red bows on them. Likes to do it. Not any more. I could tell you a funny story about that girl and that off bay. Would make you laugh. Off horse is eight, near is ten, but might of been twin colts the way they work together. See? The teeth. Sound all over. Deep lungs. Feet fair and clean. How much? Ten dollars? For both? And the wagon—Oh, Jesus Christ! I'd shoot 'em for dog feed first. Oh, take 'em! Take 'em quick, mister. You're buying a little girl plaiting the forelocks, taking off her hair ribbon to make bows, standing back, head cocked, rubbing the soft noses with her cheek. You're buying years of work, toil in the sun; you're buying a sorrow that can't talk. But watch it, mister. There's a premium goes with this pile of junk and the bay horses—so beautiful—a packet of bitterness to grow in your house and to flower, some day. We could have saved you, but you cut us down, and soon you will be cut down and there'll be none of us to save you.

And the tenant men came walking back, hands in their pockets, hats pulled down. Some bought a pint and drank it fast to make the impact hard and stunning. But they didn't laugh and they didn't dance. They didn't sing or pick the guitars. They walked back to the farms, hands in pockets and heads down, shoes kicking the red dust up.

Maybe we can start again, in the new rich land—in California, where the fruit grows. We'll start over.

But you can't start. Only a baby can start. You and me—why, we're all that's been. The anger of a moment, the thousand pictures, that's us. This land, this red land, is us; and the flood years and the dust years and the drought years are us. We can't start again. The bitterness we sold to the junk man—he got it all right, but we have it still. And when the owner men told us to go, that's us; and when the tractor hit the house, that's us until we're dead. To California or any place—every one a drum major leading a parade of hurts, marching with our bitterness. And some day—the armies of bitterness will all be going the same way. And they'll all walk together, and there'll be a dead terror from it.

The tenant men scuffed home to the farms through the red dust.

When everything that could be sold was sold, stoves and bedsteads, chairs and tables, little corner cupboards, tubs and tanks,

still there were piles of possessions; and the women sat among them, turning them over and looking off beyond and back, pictures, square glasses, and here's a vase.

Now you know well what we can take and what we can't take. We'll be camping out—a few pots to cook and wash in, and mattresses and comforts, lantern and buckets, and a piece of canvas. Use that for a tent. This kerosene can. Know what that is? That's the stove. And clothes—take all the clothes. And—the rifle? Wouldn't go out naked of a rifle. When shoes and clothes and food, when even hope is gone, we'll have the rifle. When grampa came—did I tell you?—he had pepper and salt and a rifle. Nothing else. That goes. And a bottle for water. That just about fills us. Right up the sides of the trailer, and the kids can set in the trailer, and granma on a mattress. Tools, a shovel and saw and wrench and pliers. An ax, too. We had that ax forty years. Look how she's wore down. And ropes, of course. The rest? Leave it—or burn it up.

And the children came.

If Mary takes that doll, that dirty rag doll, I got to take my Injun bow. I got to. An' this roun stick—big as me. I might need this stick. I had this stick so long—a month, or maybe a year. I got to take it. And what's it like in California?

The women sat among the doomed things, turning them over and looking past them and back. This book. My father had it. He liked a book. *Pilgrim's Progress*. Used to read it. Got his name in it. And his pipe—still smells rank. And this picture—an angel. I looked at that before the fust three come—didn't seem to do much good. Think we could get this china dog in? Aunt Sadie brought it from the St. Louis Fair. See? Wrote right on it. No, I guess not. Here's a letter my brother wrote the day before he died. Here's an old-time hat. These feathers—never got to use them. No, there isn't room.

How can we live without our lives? How will we know it's us without our past? No. Leave it. Burn it.

They sat and looked at it and burned it into their memories. How'll it be not to know what land's outside the door? How if you wake up in the night and know—and *know* the willow tree's not there? Can you live without the willow tree? Well, no, you can't. The willow tree is you. The pain on that mattress there—that dreadful pain—that's you.

And the children—if Sam takes his Injun bow an' his long roun'

stick, I get to take two things. I choose the fluffy pilla. That's mine.

Suddenly they were nervous. Got to get out quick now. Can't wait. We can't wait. And they piled up the goods in the yards and set fire to them. They stood and watched them burning, and then frantically they loaded up the cars and drove away, drove in the dust. The dust hung in the air for a long time after the loaded cars had passed.

Chapter 10

When the truck had gone, loaded with implements, with heavy tools, with beds and springs, with every movable thing that might be sold, Tom hung around the place. He mooned into the barn shed, into the empty stalls, and he walked into the implement lean-to and kicked the refuse that was left, turned a broken mower tooth with his foot. He visited places he remembered—the red bank where the swallows nested, the willow tree over the pig pen. Two shoats grunted and squirmed at him through the fence, black pigs, sunning and comfortable. And then his pilgrimage was over, and he went to sit on the doorstep where the shade was lately fallen. Behind him Ma moved about in the kitchen, washing children's clothes in a bucket; and her strong freckled arms dripped soapsuds from the elbows. She stopped her rubbing when he sat down. She looked at him a long time, and at the back of his head when he turned and stared out at the hot sunlight. And then she went back to her rubbing.

She said, "Tom, I hope things is all right in California."

He turned and looked at her. "What makes you think they ain't?" he asked.

"Well—nothing. Seems too nice, kinda. I seen the han'bills fellas pass out, an' how much work they is, an' high wages an' all; an' I seen in the paper how they want folks to come an' pick grapes an' oranges an' peaches. That'd be nice work, Tom, pickin' peaches. Even if they wouldn't let you eat none, you could maybe snitch a little ratty one sometimes. An' it'd be nice under the trees, workin' in the shade. I'm scared of stuff so nice. I ain't got faith. I'm scared somepin ain't so nice about it."

Tom said, "Don't roust your faith bird-high an' you won't do no crawlin' with the worms."

"I know that's right. That's Scripture, ain't it?"

"I guess so," said Tom. "I never could keep Scripture straight sence I read a book name' *The Winning of Barbara Worth*."

Ma chuckled lightly and scrounged the clothes in and out of the bucket. And she wrung out overalls and shirts, and the muscles of her forearms corded out. "Your Pa's pa, he quoted Scripture all the time. He got it all roiled up, too. It was the *Dr. Miles' Almanac* he

got mixed up. Used to read ever' word in that almanac out loud—letters from folks that couldn't sleep or had lame backs. An' later he'd give them people for a lesson, an' he'd say, 'That's a par'ble from Scripture.' Your Pa an' Uncle John troubled 'im some about it when they'd laugh." She piled wrung clothes like cord wood on the table. "They say it's two thousan' miles where we're goin'. How far ya think that is, Tom? I seen it on a map, big mountains like on a post card, an' we're goin' right through 'em. How long ya s'pose it'll take to go that far, Tommy?"

"I dunno," he said. "Two weeks, maybe ten days if we got luck. Look, Ma, stop your worryin'.I'm a-gonna tell you somepin about bein' in the pen. You can't go thinkin' when you're gonna be out. You'd go nuts. You got to think about that day, an' then the nex' day, about the ball game Sat'dy. That's what you got to do. Ol' timers does that. A new young fella gets buttin' his head on the cell door. He's thinkin' how long it's gonna be. Whyn't you do that? Jus' take ever' day."

"That's a good way," she said, and she filled up her bucket with hot water from the stove, and she put in dirty clothes and began punching them down into the soapy water. "Yes, that's a good way. But I like to think how nice it's gonna be, maybe, in California. Never cold. An' fruit ever'place, an' people just bein' in the nicest places, little white houses in among the orange trees. I wonder—that is, if we all get jobs an' all work—maybe we can get one of them little white houses. An' the little fellas go out an' pick oranges right off the tree. They ain't gonna be able to stand it, they'll get to yellin' so."

Tom watched her working, and his eyes smiled. "It done you good jus' thinkin' about it. I knowed a fella from California. He didn't talk like us. You'd of knowed he come from some far-off place jus' the way he talked. But he says they's too many folks lookin' for work right there now. An' he says the folks that pick the fruit live in dirty ol' camps an' don't hardly get enough to eat. He says wages is low an' hard to get any."

A shadow crossed her face. "Oh, that ain't so," she said. "Your father got a han'bill on yella paper, tellin' how they need folks to work. They wouldn't go to that trouble if they wasn't plenty work. Costs 'em good money to get them han'-bills out. What'd they want ta lie for, an' costin' 'em money to lie?"

Tom shook his head. “I don’ know, Ma. It’s kinda hard to think why they done it. Maybe —” He looked out at the hot sun, shining on the red earth.

“Maybe what?”

“Maybe it’s nice, like you says. Where’d Grampa go? Where’d the preacher go?”

Ma was going out of the house, her arms loaded high with the clothes. Tom moved aside to let her pass. “Preacher says he’s gonna walk aroun’. Grampa’s asleep here in the house. He comes in here in the day an’ lays down sometimes.” She walked to the line and began to drape pale blue jeans and blue shirts and long gray underwear over the wire.

Behind him Tom heard a shuffling step, and he turned to look in. Grampa was emerging from the bedroom, and as in the morning, he fumbled with the buttons of his fly. “I heerd talkin’,” he said. “Sons-a-bitches won’t let a ol’ fella sleep. When you bastards get dry behin’ the ears, you’ll maybe learn to let a ol’ fella sleep.” His furious fingers managed to flip open the only two buttons on his fly that had been buttoned. And his hand forgot what it had been trying to do. His hand reached in and contentedly scratched under the testicles. Ma came in with wet hands, and her palms puckered and bloated from hot water and soap.

“Thought you was sleepin’. Here, let me button you up.” And though he struggled, she held him and buttoned his underwear and his shirt and his fly. “You go aroun’ a sight,” she said, and let him go.

And he spluttered angrily, “Fella’s come to a nice—to a nice—when somebody buttons ’em. I want ta be let be to button my own pants.”

Ma said playfully, “They don’t let people run aroun’ with their clothes unbutton’ in California.”

“They don’t, hey! Well, I’ll show ’em. They think they’re gonna show me how to act out there? Why, I’ll go aroun’ a-hangin’ out if I wanta!”

Ma said, “Seems like his language gets worse ever’ year. Showin’ off, I guess.”

The old man thrust out his bristly chin, and he regarded Ma with his shrewd, mean, merry eyes. “Well, sir,” he said, “we’ll be a-

startin' 'fore long now. An', by God, they's grapes out there, just a-hangin' over inta the road. Know what I'm a-gonna do? I'm gonna pick me a wash tub full a grapes, an' I'm gonna set in 'em, an' scrooge aroun', an' let the juice run down my pants."

Tom laughed. "By God, if he lives to be two hunderd you never will get Grampa house broke," he said. "You're all set on goin', ain't you, Grampa?"

The old man pulled out a box and sat down heavily on it. "Yes, sir," he said. "An' goddamn near time, too. My brother went on out there forty years ago. Never did hear nothin' about him. Sneaky son-of-a-bitch, he was. Nobody loved him. Run off with a single-action Colt of mine. If I ever run across him or his kids, if he got any out in California, I'll ask 'em for that Colt. But if I know 'im, an' he got any kids, he cuckoo'd 'em, an' somebody else is a-raisin' 'em. I sure will be glad to get out there. Got a feelin' it'll make a new fella outa me. Go right to work in the fruit."

Ma nodded. "He means it, too," she said. "Worked right up to three months ago, when he throwed his hip out the last time."

"Damn right," said Grampa.

Tom looked outward from his seat on the doorstep. "Here comes that preacher, walkin' aroun' from the back side a the barn."

Ma said, "Curiousest grace I ever heerd, that he give this mornin'. Wasn't hardly no grace at all. Jus' talkin', but the sound of it was like a grace."

"He's a funny fella," said Tom. "Talks funny all the time. Seems like he's talkin' to hisself, though. He ain't tryin' to put nothin' over."

"Watch the look in his eye," said Ma. "He looks baptized. Got that look they call lookin' through. He sure looks baptized. An' a-walkin' with his head down, a-starin' at nothin' on the groun'. There *is* a man that's baptized." And she was silent, for Casy had drawn near the door.

"You gonna get sun-shook, walkin' around like that," said Tom.

Casy said, "Well, yeah—maybe." He appealed to them all suddenly, to Ma and Grampa and Tom. "I got to get goin' west. I got to go. I wonder if I kin go along with you folks." And then he stood, embarrassed by his own speech.

Ma looked to Tom to speak, because he was a man, but Tom did

not speak. She let him have the chance that was his right, and then she said, “Why, we’d be proud to have you. ’Course I can’t say right now; Pa says all the men’ll talk tonight and figger when we gonna start. I guess maybe we better not say till all the men come. John an’ Pa an’ Noah an’ Tom an’ Grampa an’ Al an’ Connie, they’re gonna figger soon’s they get back. But if they’s room I’m pretty sure we’ll be proud to have ya.”

The preacher sighed. “I’ll go anyways,” he said. “Somepin’s happening. I went up an’ I looked, an’ the houses is all empty, an’ the lan’ is empty, an’ this whole country is empty. I can’t stay here no more. I got to go where the folks is goin’.I’ll work in the fiel’s, an’ maybe I’ll be happy.”

“An’ you ain’t gonna preach?” Tom asked.

“I ain’t gonna preach.”

“An’ you ain’t gonna baptize?” Ma asked.

“I ain’t gonna baptize. I’m gonna work in the fiel’s, in the green fiel’s, an’ I’m gonna be near to folks. I ain’t gonna try to teach ’em nothin’. I’m gonna try to learn. Gonna learn why the folks walks in the grass, gonna hear ’em talk, gonna hear ’em sing. Gonna listen to kids eatin’ mush. Gonna hear husban’ an’ wife a-poundin’ the mattress in the night. Gonna eat with ’em an’ learn.” His eyes were wet and shining. “Gonna lay in the grass, open an’ honest with anybody that’ll have me. Gonna cuss an’ swear an’ hear the poetry of folks talkin’. All that’s holy, all that’s what I didn’ understan’. All them things is the good things.”

Ma said, “A-men.”

The preacher sat humbly down on the chopping block beside the door. “I wonder what they is for a fella so lonely.”

Tom coughed delicately. “For a fella that don’t preach no more —” he began.

“Oh, I’m a talker!” said Casy. “No gettin’ away from that. But I ain’t preachin’. Preachin’ is tellin’ folks stuff. I’m askin’ ’em. That ain’t preachin’, is it?”

“I don’ know,” said Tom. “Preachin’s a kinda tone a voice, an’ preachin’s a way a lookin’ at things. Preachin’s bein’ good to folks when they wanna kill ya for it. Las’ Christmus in McAlester, Salvation Army come an’ done us good. Three solid hours a cornet music, an’ we set there. They was bein’ nice to us. But if one of us

tried to walk out, we'd a-drawed solitary. That's preachin'. Doin' good to a fella that's down an' can't smack ya in the puss for it. No, you ain't no preacher. But don't you blow no cornets aroun' here."

Ma threw some sticks into the stove. "I'll get you a bite now, but it ain't much."

Grampa brought his box outside and sat on it and leaned against the wall, and Tom and Casy leaned back against the house wall. And the shadow of the afternoon moved out from the house.

In the late afternoon the truck came back, bumping and rattling through the dust, and there was a layer of dust in the bed, and the hood was covered with dust, and the headlights were obscured with a red flour. The sun was setting when the truck came back, and the earth was bloody in its setting light. Al sat bent over the wheel, proud and serious and efficient, and Pa and Uncle John, as befitted the heads of the clan, had the honor seats beside the driver. Standing in the truck bed, holding onto the bars of the sides, rode the others, twelve-year-old Ruthie and ten-year-old Winfield, grime-faced and wild, their eyes tired but excited, their fingers and the edges of their mouths black and sticky from licorice whips, whined out of their father in town. Ruthie, dressed in a real dress of pink muslin that came below her knees, was a little serious in her young-ladiness. But Winfield was still a trifle of a snot-nose, a little of a brooder back of the barn, and an inveterate collector and smoker of snipes. And whereas Ruthie felt the might, the responsibility, and the dignity of her developing breasts, Winfield was kid-wild and calfish. Beside them, clinging lightly to the bars, stood Rose of Sharon, and she balanced, swaying on the balls of her feet, and took up the road shock in her knees and hams. For Rose of Sharon was pregnant and careful. Her hair, braided and wrapped around her head, made an ash-blond crown. Her round soft face, which had been voluptuous and inviting a few months ago, had already put on the barrier of pregnancy, the self-sufficient smile, the knowing perfection-look; and her plump body—full soft breasts and stomach, hard hips and buttocks that had swung so freely and provocatively as to invite slapping and stroking—her whole body had become demure and serious. Her whole thought and action were directed inward on the baby. She balanced on her toes now, for the baby's sake. And the world was pregnant to her; she thought only in terms

of reproduction and of motherhood. Connie, her nineteen-year-old husband, who had married a plump, passionate hoyden, was still frightened and bewildered at the change in her; for there were no more cat fights in bed, biting and scratching with muffled giggles and final tears. There was a balanced, careful, wise creature who smiled shyly but very firmly at him. Connie was proud and fearful of Rose of Sharon. Whenever he could, he put a hand on her or stood close, so that his body touched her at hip and shoulder, and he felt that this kept a relation that might be departing. He was a sharp-faced, lean young man of a Texas strain, and his pale blue eyes were sometimes dangerous and sometimes kindly, and sometimes frightened. He was a good hard worker and would make a good husband. He drank enough, but not too much; fought when it was required of him; and never boasted. He sat quietly in a gathering and yet managed to be there and to be recognized.

Had he not been fifty years old, and so one of the natural rulers of the family, Uncle John would have preferred not to sit in the honor place beside the driver. He would have liked Rose of Sharon to sit there. This was impossible, because she was young and a woman. But Uncle John sat uneasily, his lonely haunted eyes were not at ease, and his thin strong body was not relaxed. Nearly all the time the barrier of loneliness cut Uncle John off from people and from appetites. He ate little, drank nothing, and was celibate. But underneath, his appetites swelled into pressures until they broke through. Then he would eat of some craved food until he was sick; or he would drink jake or whisky until he was a shaken paralytic with red wet eyes; or he would raven with lust for some whore in Sallisaw. It was told of him that once he went clear to Shawnee and hired three whores in one bed, and snorted and rutted on their unresponsive bodies for an hour. But when one of his appetites was sated, he was sad and ashamed and lonely again. He hid from people, and by gifts tried to make up to all people for himself. Then he crept into houses and left gum under pillows for children; then he cut wood and took no pay. Then he gave away any possession he might have: a saddle, a horse, a new pair of shoes. One could not talk to him then, for he ran away, or if confronted hid within himself and peeked out of frightened eyes. The death of his wife, followed by months of being alone, had marked him with guilt and shame and had left an unbreaking loneliness on him.

But there were things he could not escape. Being one of the heads

of the family, he had to govern; and now he had to sit on the honor seat beside the driver.

The three men on the seat were glum as they drove toward home over the dusty road. Al, bending over the wheel, kept shifting eyes from the road to the instrument panel, watching the ammeter needle, which jerked suspiciously, watching the oil gauge and the heat indicator. And his mind was cataloguing weak points and suspicious things about the car. He listened to the whine, which might be the rear end, dry; and he listened to tappets lifting and falling. He kept his hand on the gear lever, feeling the turning gears through it. And he had let the clutch out against the brake to test for slipping clutch plates. He might be a musking goat sometimes, but this was his responsibility, this truck, its running, and its maintenance. If something went wrong it would be his fault, and while no one would say it, everyone, and Al most of all, would know it was his fault. And so he felt it, watched it, and listened to it. And his face was serious and responsible. And everyone respected him and his responsibility. Even Pa, who was the leader, would hold a wrench and take orders from Al.

They were all tired on the truck. Ruthie and Winfield were tired from seeing too much movement, too many faces, from fighting to get licorice whips; tired from the excitement of having Uncle John secretly slip gum into their pockets.

And the men in the seat were tired and angry and sad, for they had got eighteen dollars for every movable thing from the farm: the horses, the wagon, the implements, and all the furniture from the house. Eighteen dollars. They had assailed the buyer, argued; but they were routed when his interest seemed to flag and he had told them he didn't want the stuff at any price. Then they were beaten, believed him, and took two dollars less than he had first offered. And now they were weary and frightened because they had gone against a system they did not understand and it had beaten them. They knew the team and the wagon were worth much more. They knew the buyer man would get much more, but they didn't know how to do it. Merchandising was a secret to them.

Al, his eyes darting from road to panel board, said, "That fella, he ain't a local fella. Didn' talk like a local fella. Clothes was different, too."

And Pa explained, "When I was in the hardware store I talked to

some men I know. They say there's fellas comin' in jus' to buy up the stuff us fellas got to sell when we get out. They say these new fellas is cleaning up. But there ain't nothin' we can do about it. Maybe Tommy should of went. Maybe he could of did better."

John said, "But the fella wasn't gonna take it at all. We couldn' haul it back."

"These men I know told about that," said Pa. "Said the buyer fellas always done that. Scairt folks that way. We jus' don' know how to go about stuff like that. Ma's gonna be disappointed. She'll be mad an' disappointed."

Al said, "When ya think we're gonna go, Pa?"

"I dunno. We'll talk her over tonight an' decide. I'm sure glad Tom's back. That makes me feel good. Tom's a good boy."

Al said, "Pa, some fellas was talkin' about Tom, an' they says he's parole'. An' they says that means he can't go outside the State, or if he goes, an' they catch him, they send 'im back for three years."

Pa looked startled. "They said that? Seem like fellas that knowed? Not jus' blowin' off?"

"I don' know," said Al. "They was just a-talkin' there, an' I didn' let on he's my brother. I jus' stood an' took it in."

Pa said, "Jesus Christ, I hope that ain't true! We need Tom. I'll ask 'im about that. We got trouble enough without they chase the hell out of us. I hope it ain't true. We got to talk that out in the open."

Uncle John said, "Tom, he'll know."

They fell silent while the truck battered along. The engine was noisy, full of little clashings, and the brake rods banged. There was a wooden creaking from the wheels, and a thin jet of steam escaped through a hole in the top of the radiator cap. The truck pulled a high whirling column of red dust behind it. They rumbled up the last little rise while the sun was still half-face above the horizon, and they bore down on the house as it disappeared. The brakes squealed when they stopped, and the sound printed in Al's head—no lining left.

Ruthie and Winfield climbed yelling over the side walls and dropped to the ground. They shouted, "Where is he? Where's Tom?" And then they saw him standing beside the door, and they stopped, embarrassed, and walked slowly toward him and looked shyly at

him.

And when he said, “Hello, how you kids doin’?” they replied softly, “Hello! All right.” And they stood apart and watched him secretly, the great brother who had killed a man and been in prison. They remembered how they had played prison in the chicken coop and fought for the right to be prisoner.

Connie Rivers lifted the high tail-gate out of the truck and got down and helped Rose of Sharon to the ground; and she accepted it nobly, smiling her wise, self-satisfied smile, mouth tipped at the corners a little fatuously.

Tom said, “Why, it’s Rosasharn. I didn’ know you was comin’ with them.”

“We was walkin’,” she said. “The truck come by an’ picked us up.” And then she said, “This is Connie, my husband.” And she was grand, saying it.

The two shook hands, sizing each other up, looking deeply into each other; and in a moment each was satisfied, and Tom said, “Well, I see you been busy.”

She looked down. “You do not see, not yet.”

“Ma tol’ me. When’s it gonna be?”

“Oh, not for a long time! Not till nex’ winter.”

Tom laughed. “Gonna get ’im bore in a orange ranch, huh? In one a them white houses with orange trees all aroun’.”

Rose of Sharon felt her stomach with both her hands. “You do not see,” she said, and she smiled her complacent smile and went into the house. The evening was hot, and the thrust of light still flowed up from the western horizon. And without any signal the family gathered by the truck, and the congress, the family government, went into session.

The film of evening light made the red earth lucent, so that its dimensions were deepened, so that a stone, a post, a building had greater depth and more solidity than in the daytime light; and these objects were curiously more individual—a post was more essentially a post, set off from the earth it stood in and the field of corn it stood out against. And plants were individuals, not the mass of crop; and the ragged willow tree was itself, standing free of all other willow trees. The earth contributed a light to the evening. The front of the gray, paintless house, facing the west, was luminous as

the moon is. The gray dusty truck, in the yard before the door, stood out magically in this light, in the overdrawn perspective of a stereopticon.

The people too were changed in the evening, quieted. They seemed to be a part of an organization of the unconscious. They obeyed impulses which registered only faintly in their thinking minds. Their eyes were inward and quiet, and their eyes, too, were lucent in the evening, lucent in dusty faces.

The family met at the most important place, near the truck. The house was dead, and the fields were dead; but this truck was the active thing, the living principle. The ancient Hudson, with bent and scarred radiator screen, with grease in dusty globules at the worn edges of every moving part, with hub caps gone and caps of red dust in their places—this was the new hearth, the living center of the family; half passenger car and half truck, high-sided and clumsy.

Pa walked around the truck, looking at it, and then he squatted down in the dust and found a stick to draw with. One foot was flat to the ground, the other rested on the ball and slightly back, so that one knee was higher than the other. Left forearm rested on the lower, left, knee; the right elbow on the right knee, and the right fist cupped for the chin. Pa squatted there, looking at the truck, his chin in his cupped fist. And Uncle John moved toward him and squatted down beside him. Their eyes were brooding. Grampa came out of the house and saw the two squatting together, and he jerked over and sat on the running board of the truck, facing them. That was the nucleus. Tom and Connie and Noah strolled in and squatted, and the line was a half-circle with Grampa in the opening. And then Ma came out of the house, and Granma with her, and Rose of Sharon behind, walking daintily. They took their places behind the squatting men; they stood up and put their hands on their hips. And the children, Ruthie and Winfield, hopped from foot to foot beside the women; the children squidged their toes in the red dust, but they made no sound. Only the preacher was not there. He, out of delicacy, was sitting on the ground behind the house. He was a good preacher and knew his people.

The evening light grew softer, and for a while the family sat and stood silently. Then Pa, speaking to no one, but to the group, made his report. “Got skinned on the stuff we sold. The fella knowed we

couldn't wait. Got eighteen dollars only."

Ma stirred restively, but she held her peace.

Noah, the oldest son, asked, "How much, all added up, we got?"

Pa drew figures in the dust and mumbled to himself for a moment. "Hunderd fifty-four," he said. "But Al here says we gonna need better tires. Says these here won't last."

This was Al's first participation in the conference. Always he had stood behind with the women before. And now he made his report solemnly. "She's old an' she's ornery," he said gravely. "I gave the whole thing a good goin'-over 'fore we bought her. Didn' listen to the fella talkin' what a hell of a bargain she was. Stuck my finger in the differential and they wasn't no sawdust. Opened the gear box an' they wasn't no sawdust. Test' her clutch an' rolled her wheels for line. Went under her an' her frame ain't splayed none. She never been rolled. Seen they was a cracked cell in her battery an' made the fella put in a good one. The tires ain't worth a damn, but they're a good size. Easy to get. She'll ride like a bull calf, but she ain't shootin' no oil. Reason I says buy her is she was a pop'lar car. Wreckin' yards is full a Hudson Super-Sixes, an' you can buy parts cheap. Could a got a bigger, fancier car for the same money, but parts too hard to get, an' too dear. That's how I figgered her anyways." The last was his submission to the family. He stopped speaking and waited for their opinions.

Grampa was still the titular head, but he no longer ruled. His position was honorary and a matter of custom. But he did have the right of first comment, no matter how silly his old mind might be. And the squatting men and the standing women waited for him. "You're all right, Al," Grampa said. "I was a squirt jus' like you, a-fartin' aroun' like a dog-wolf. But when they was a job, I done it. You've growed up good." He finished in the tone of a benediction, and Al reddened a little with pleasure.

Pa said, "Sounds right-side-up to me. If it was horses we wouldn' have to put the blame on Al. But Al's the on'y automobile fella here."

Tom said, "I know some. Worked some in McAlester. Al's right. He done good." And now Al was rosy with the compliment. Tom went on, "I'd like to say—well, that preacher—he wants to go along." He was silent. His words lay in the group, and the group was silent. "He's a nice fella," Tom added. "We've knowed him a

long time. Talks a little wild sometimes, but he talks sensible." And he relinquished the proposal to the family.

The light was going gradually. Ma left the group and went into the house, and the iron clang of the stove came from the house. In a moment she walked back to the brooding council.

Grampa said, "They was two ways a thinkin'. Some folks use' ta figger that a preacher was poison luck."

Tom said, "This fella says he ain't a preacher no more."

Grampa waved his hand back and forth. "Once a fella's a preacher, he's always a preacher. That's somepin you can't get shut of. They was some folks figgered it was a good respectable thing to have a preacher along. Ef somebody died, preacher buried 'em. Weddin' come due, or overdue, an' there's your preacher. Baby come, an' you got a christener right under the roof. Me, I always said they was preachers *an*' preachers. Got to pick 'em. I kinda like this fella. He ain't stiff."

Pa dug his stick into the dust and rolled it between his fingers so that it bored a little hole. "They's more to this than is he lucky, or is he a nice fella," Pa said. "We got to figger close. It's a sad thing to figger close. Le's see, now. There's Grampa an' Granma—that's two. An' me an' John an' Ma—that's five. An' Noah an' Tommy an' Al—that's eight. Rosasharn an' Connie is ten, an' Ruthie an' Winfiel' is twelve. We got to take the dogs 'cause what'll we do else? Can't shoot a good dog, an' there ain't nobody to give 'em to. An' that's fourteen."

"Not countin' what chickens is left, an' two pigs," said Noah.

Pa said, "I aim to get those pigs salted down to eat on the way. We gonna need meat. Carry the salt kegs right with us. But I'm wonderin' if we can all ride, an' the preacher too. An' kin we feed a extra mouth?" Without turning his head he asked, "Kin we, Ma?"

Ma cleared her throat. "It ain't kin we? It's will we?" she said firmly. "As far as 'kin,' we can't do nothin', not go to California or nothin'; but as far as 'will,' why, we'll do what we will. An' as far as 'will'—it's a long time our folks been here and east before, an' I never heerd tell of no Joads or no Hazletts, neither, ever refusin' food an' shelter or a lift on the road to anybody that asked. They's been mean Joads, but never that mean."

Pa broke in, "But s'pose there just ain't room?" He had twisted his

neck to look up at her, and he was ashamed. Her tone had made him ashamed. “S’pose we jus’ can’t all get in the truck?”

“There ain’t room now,” she said. “There ain’t room for more’n six, an’ twelve is goin’ sure. One more ain’t gonna hurt; an’ a man, strong an’ healthy, ain’t never no burden. An’ any time when we got two pigs an’ over a hunderd dollars, an’ we wonderin’ if we kin feed a fella —” She stopped, and Pa turned back, and his spirit was raw from the whipping.

Granma said, “A preacher is a nice thing to be with us. He give a nice grace this morning.”

Pa looked at the face of each one for dissent, and then he said, “Want to call ’im over, Tommy? If he’s goin’, he ought ta be here.”

Tom got up from his hams and went toward the house, calling, “Casy—oh, Casy!”

A muffled voice replied from behind the house. Tom walked to the corner and saw the preacher sitting back against the wall, looking at the flashing evening star in the light sky. “Calling me?” Casy asked.

“Yeah. We think long as you’re goin’ with us, you ought to be over with us, helpin’ to figger things out.”

Casy got to his feet. He knew the government of families, and he knew he had been taken into the family. Indeed his position was eminent, for Uncle John moved sideways, leaving space between Pa and himself for the preacher. Casy squatted down like the others, facing Grampa enthroned on the running board.

Ma went to the house again. There was a screech of a lantern hood and the yellow light flashed up in the dark kitchen. When she lifted the lid of the big pot, the smell of boiling side-meat and beet greens came out the door. They waited for her to come back across the darkening yard, for Ma was powerful in the group.

Pa said, “We got to figger when to start. Sooner the better. What we got to do ’fore we go is get them pigs slaughtered an’ in salt, an’ pack our stuff an’ go. Quicker the better, now.”

Noah agreed, “If we pitch in, we kin get ready tomorrow, an’ we kin go bright the nex’ day.”

Uncle John objected, “Can’t chill no meat in the heat a the day. Wrong time a year for slaughterin’. Meat’ll be sof’ if it don’ chill.”

“Well, le’s do her tonight. She’ll chill tonight some. Much as she’s

gonna. After we eat, le's get her done. Got salt?"

Ma said, "Yes. Got plenty salt. Got two nice kegs, too."

"Well, le's get her done, then," said Tom.

Grampa began to scrabble about, trying to get a purchase to arise. "Gettin' dark," he said. "I'm gettin' hungry. Come time we get to California I'll have a big bunch a grapes in my han' all the time, a-nibblin' off it all the time, by God!" He got up, and the men arose.

Ruthie and Winfield hopped excitedly about in the dust, like crazy things. Ruthie whispered hoarsely to Winfield, "Killin' pigs *and* goin' to California. Killin' pigs *and* goin'—all the same time."

And Winfield was reduced to madness. He stuck his finger against his throat, made a horrible face, and wobbled about, weakly shrilling, "I'm a ol' pig. Look! I'm a ol' pig. Look at the blood, Ruthie!" And he staggered and sank to the ground, and waved arms and legs weakly.

But Ruthie was older, and she knew the tremendousness of the time. "*And* goin' to California," she said again. And she knew this was the great time in her life so far.

The adults moved toward the lighted kitchen through the deep dusk, and Ma served them greens and side-meat in tin plates. But before Ma ate, she put the big round wash tub on the stove and started the fire to roaring. She carried buckets of water until the tub was full, and then around the tub she clustered the buckets, full of water. The kitchen became a swamp of heat, and the family ate hurriedly, and went out to sit on the doorstep until the water should get hot. They sat looking out at the dark, at the square of light the kitchen lantern threw on the ground outside the door, with a hunched shadow of Grampa in the middle of it. Noah picked his teeth thoroughly with a broom straw. Ma and Rose of Sharon washed up the dishes and piled them on the table.

And then, all of a sudden, the family began to function. Pa got up and lighted another lantern. Noah, from a box in the kitchen, brought out the bow-bladed butchering knife and whetted it on a worn little carborundum stone. And he laid the scraper on the chopping block, and the knife beside it. Pa brought two sturdy sticks, each three feet long, and pointed the ends with the ax, and he tied strong ropes, double half-hitched, to the middle of the sticks.

He grumbled, “Shouldn’t of sold those singletrees—all of ’em.”

The water in the pots steamed and rolled.

Noah asked, “Gonna take the water down there or bring the pigs up here?”

“Pigs up here,” said Pa. “You can’t spill a pig and scald yourself like you can hot water. Water about ready?”

“Jus’ about,” said Ma.

“Aw right. Noah, you an’ Tom an’ Al come along. I’ll carry the light. We’ll slaughter down there an’ bring ’em up here.”

Noah took his knife, and Al the ax, and the four men moved down on the sty, their legs flickering in the lantern light. Ruthie and Winfield skittered along, hopping over the ground. At the sty Pa leaned over the fence, holding the lantern. The sleepy young pigs struggled to their feet, grunting suspiciously. Uncle John and the preacher walked down to help.

“All right,” said Pa. “Stick ’em, an’ we’ll run ’em up and bleed an’ scald at the house.” Noah and Tom stepped over the fence. They slaughtered quickly and efficiently. Tom struck twice with the blunt head of the ax; and Noah, leaning over the felled pigs, found the great artery with his curving knife and released the pulsing streams of blood. Then over the fence with the squealing pigs. The preacher and Uncle John dragged one by the hind legs, and Tom and Noah the other. Pa walked along with the lantern, and the black blood made two trails in the dust.

At the house, Noah slipped his knife between tendon and bone of the hind legs; the pointed sticks held the legs apart, and the carcasses were hung from the two-by-four rafters that stuck out from the house. Then the men carried the boiling water and poured it over the black bodies. Noah slit the bodies from end to end and dropped the entrails out on the ground. Pa sharpened two more sticks to hold the bodies open to the air, while Tom with the scrubber and Ma with a dull knife scraped the skins to take out the bristles. Al brought a bucket and shoveled the entrails into it, and dumped them on the ground away from the house, and two cats followed him, mewing loudly, and the dogs followed him, growling lightly at the cats.

Pa sat on the doorstep and looked at the pigs hanging in the lantern light. The scraping was done now, and only a few drops of

blood continued to fall from the carcasses into the black pool on the ground. Pa got up and went to the pigs and felt them with his hand, and then he sat down again. Granma and Grampa went toward the barn to sleep, and Grampa carried a candle lantern in his hand. The rest of the family sat quietly about the doorstep, Connie and Al and Tom on the ground, leaning their backs against the house wall, Uncle John on a box, Pa in the doorway. Only Ma and Rose of Sharon continued to move about. Ruthie and Winfield were sleepy now, but fighting it off. They quarreled sleepily out in the darkness. Noah and the preacher squatted side by side, facing the house. Pa scratched himself nervously, and took off his hat and ran his fingers through his hair. "Tomorra we'll get that pork salted early in the morning, an' then we'll get the truck loaded, all but the beds, an' nex' morning off we'll go. Hardly is a day's work in all that," he said uneasily.

Tom broke in, "We'll be moonin' aroun' all day, lookin' for somepin to do." The group stirred uneasily. "We could get ready by daylight an' go," Tom suggested. Pa rubbed his knee with his hand. And the restiveness spread to all of them.

Noah said, "Prob'ly wouldn' hurt that meat to git her right down in salt. Cut her up, she'd cool quicker anyways."

It was Uncle John who broke over the edge, his pressures too great. "What we hangin' aroun' for? I want to get shut of this. Now we're goin', why don't we go?"

And the revulsion spread to the rest. "Whyn't we go? Get sleep on the way." And a sense of hurry crept into them.

Pa said, "They say it's two thousan' miles. That's a hell of a long ways. We oughta go. Noah, you an' me can get that meat cut up an' we can put all the stuff in the truck."

Ma put her head out of the door. "How about if we forgit somepin, not seein' it in the dark?"

"We could look 'round after daylight," said Noah. They sat still then, thinking about it. But in a moment Noah got up and began to sharpen the bow-bladed knife on his little worn stone. "Ma," he said, "git that table cleared." And he stepped to a pig, cut a line down one side of the backbone and began peeling the meat forward, off the ribs.

Pa stood up excitedly. "We got to get the stuff together," he said. "Come on, you fellas."

Now that they were committed to going, the hurry infected all of them. Noah carried the slabs of meat into the kitchen and cut it into small salting blocks, and Ma patted the coarse salt in, laid it piece by piece in the kegs, careful that no two pieces touched each other. She laid the slabs like bricks, and pounded salt in the spaces. And Noah cut up the side-meat and he cut up the legs. Ma kept her fire going, and as Noah cleaned the ribs and the spines and leg bones of all the meat he could, she put them in the oven to roast for gnawing purposes.

In the yard and in the barn the circles of lantern light moved about, and the men brought together all the things to be taken, and piled them by the truck. Rose of Sharon brought out all the clothes the family possessed: the overalls, the thick-soled shoes, the rubber boots, the worn best suits, the sweaters and sheepskin coats. And she packed these tightly into a wooden box and got into the box and tramped them down. And then she brought out the print dresses and shawls, the black cotton stockings and the children's clothes—small overalls and cheap print dresses—and she put these in the box and tramped them down.

Tom went to the tool shed and brought what tools were left to go, a hand saw and a set of wrenches, a hammer and a box of assorted nails, a pair of pliers and a flat file and a set of rat-tail files.

And Rose of Sharon brought out the big piece of tarpaulin and spread it on the ground behind the truck. She struggled through the door with the mattresses, three double ones and a single. She piled them on the tarpaulin and brought arm-loads of folded ragged blankets and piled them up.

Ma and Noah worked busily at the carcasses, and the smell of roasting pork bones came from the stove. The children had fallen by the way in the late night. Winfield lay curled up in the dust outside the door; and Ruthie, sitting on a box in the kitchen where she had gone to watch the butchering, had dropped her head back against the wall. She breathed easily in her sleep, and her lips were parted over her teeth.

Tom finished with the tools and came into the kitchen with his lantern, and the preacher followed him. "God in a buckboard," Tom said, "smell that meat! An' listen to her crackle."

Ma laid the bricks of meat in a keg and poured salt around and over them and covered the layer with salt and patted it down. She

looked up at Tom and smiled a little at him, but her eyes were serious and tired. “Be nice to have pork bones for breakfas’,” she said.

The preacher stepped beside her. “Leave me salt down this meat,” he said. “I can do it. There’s other stuff for you to do.”

She stopped her work then and inspected him oddly, as though he suggested a curious thing. And her hands were crusted with salt, pink with fluid from the fresh pork. “It’s women’s work,” she said finally.

“It’s all work,” the preacher replied. “They’s too much of it to split it up to men’s or women’s work. You got stuff to do. Leave me salt the meat.”

Still for a moment she stared at him, and then she poured water from a bucket into the tin wash basin and she washed her hands. The preacher took up the blocks of pork and patted on the salt while she watched him. And he laid them in the kegs as she had. Only when he had finished a layer and covered it carefully and patted down the salt was she satisfied. She dried her bleached and bloated hands.

Tom said, “Ma, what stuff we gonna take from here?”

She looked quickly about the kitchen. “The bucket,” she said. “All the stuff to eat with: plates an’ the cups, the spoons an’ knives an’ forks. Put all them in that drawer, an’ take the drawer. The big fry pan an’ the big stew kettle, the coffee pot. When it gets cool, take the rack outa the oven. That’s good over a fire. I’d like to take the wash tub, but I guess there ain’t room. I’ll wash clothes in the bucket. Don’t do no good to take little stuff. You can cook little stuff in a big kettle, but you can’t cook big stuff in a little pot. Take the bread pans, all of ’em. They fit down inside each other.” She stood and looked about the kitchen. “You jus’ take that stuff I tol’ you, Tom. I’ll fix up the rest, the big can a pepper an’ the salt an’ the nutmeg an’ the grater. I’ll take all that stuff jus’ at the last.” She picked up a lantern and walked heavily into the bedroom, and her bare feet made no sound on the floor.

The preacher said, “She looks tar’d.”

“Women’s always tar’d,” said Tom. “That’s just the way women is, ’cept at meetin’ once an’ again.”

“Yeah, but tar’der’n that. Real tar’d, like she’s sick-tar’d.”

Ma was just through the door, and she heard his words. Slowly her relaxed face tightened, and the lines disappeared from the taut muscular face. Her eyes sharpened and her shoulders straightened. She glanced about the stripped room. Nothing was left in it except trash. The mattresses which had been on the floor were gone. The bureaus were sold. On the floor lay a broken comb, an empty talcum powder can, and a few dust mice. Ma set her lantern on the floor. She reached behind one of the boxes that had served as chairs and brought out a stationery box, old and soiled and cracked at the corners. She sat down and opened the box. Inside were letters, clippings, photographs, a pair of earrings, a little gold signet ring, and a watch chain braided of hair and tipped with gold swivels. She touched the letters with her fingers, touched them lightly, and she smoothed a newspaper clipping on which there was an account of Tom's trial. For a long time she held the box, looking over it, and her fingers disturbed the letters and then lined them up again. She bit her lower lip, thinking, remembering. And at last she made up her mind. She picked out the ring, the watch charm, the earrings, dug under the pile and found one gold cuff link. She took a letter from an envelope and dropped the trinkets in the envelope. She folded the envelope over and put it in her dress pocket. Then gently and tenderly she closed the box and smoothed the top carefully with her fingers. Her lips parted. And then she stood up, took her lantern, and went back into the kitchen. She lifted the stove lid and laid the box gently among the coals. Quickly the heat browned the paper. A flame licked up and over the box. She replaced the stove lid and instantly the fire sighed up and breathed over the box.

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Out in the dark yard, working in the lantern light, Pa and Al loaded the truck. Tools on the bottom, but handy to reach in case of a breakdown. Boxes of clothes next, and kitchen utensils in a gunny sack; cutlery and dishes in their box. Then the gallon bucket tied on behind. They made the bottom of the load as even as possible, and filled the spaces between boxes with rolled blankets. Then over the top they laid the mattresses, filling the truck in level. And last they spread the big tarpaulin over the load and Al made holes in the edge, two feet apart, and inserted little ropes, and tied it down to the side-bars of the truck.

“Now, if it rains,” he said, “we’ll tie it to the bar above, an’ the folks can get underneath, out of the wet. Up front we’ll be dry enough.”

And Pa applauded. “That’s a good idear.”

“That ain’t all,” Al said. “First chance I git I’m gonna fin’ a long plank an’ make a ridge pole, an’ put the tarp over that. An’ then it’ll be covered in, an’ the folks’ll be outa the sun, too.”

And Pa agreed, “That’s a good idear. Whyn’t you think a that before?”

“I ain’t had time,” said Al.

“Ain’t had time? Why, Al, you had time to coyote all over the country. God knows where you been this las’ two weeks.”

“Stuff a fella got to do when he’s leavin’ the country,” said Al. And then he lost some of his assurance. “Pa,” he asked. “You glad to be goin’, Pa?”

“Huh? Well—sure. Leastwise—yeah. We had hard times here. ’Course it’ll be all different out there—plenty work, an’ ever’thing nice an’ green, an’ little white houses an’ oranges growin’ aroun’.”

“Is it all oranges ever’where?”

“Well, maybe not ever’where, but plenty places.”

The first gray of daylight began in the sky. And the work was done—the kegs of pork ready, the chicken coop ready to go on top. Ma opened the oven and took out the pile of roasted bones, crisp and brown, with plenty of gnawing meat left. Ruthie half awakened, and slipped down from the box, and slept again. But the adults stood around the door, shivering a little and gnawing at the crisp pork.

“Guess we oughta wake up Granma an’ Grampa,” Tom said. “Gettin’ along on toward day.”

Ma said, “Kinda hate to, till the las’ minute. They need the sleep. Ruthie an’ Winfield ain’t hardly got no real rest neither.”

“Well, they kin all sleep on top a the load,” said Pa. “It’ll be nice an’ comf ’table there.”

Suddenly the dogs started up from the dust and listened. And then, with a roar, went barking off into the darkness. “Now what in hell is that?” Pa demanded. In a moment they heard a voice speaking reassuringly to the barking dogs and the barking lost its fierceness. Then footsteps, and a man approached. It was Muley

Graves, his hat pulled low.

He came near timidly. “Morning, folks,” he said.

“Why, Muley.” Pa waved the ham bone he held. “Step in an’ get some pork for yourself, Muley.”

“Well, no,” said Muley. “I ain’t hungry, exactly.”

“Oh, get it, Muley, get it. Here!” And Pa stepped into the house and brought out a hand of spareribs.

“I wasn’t aiming to eat none a your stuff,” he said. “I was jus’ walkin’ aroun’, an’ I thought how you’d be goin’, an’ I’d maybe say good-by.”

“Goin’ in a little while now,” said Pa. “You’d a missed us if you’d come an hour later. All packed up—see?”

“All packed up.” Muley looked at the loaded truck. “Sometimes I wisht I’d go an’ fin’ my folks.”

Ma asked, “Did you hear from ’em out in California?”

“No,” said Muley, “I ain’t heard. But I ain’t been to look in the post office. I oughta go in sometimes.”

Pa said, “Al, go down, wake up Granma, Grampa. Tell ’em to come an’ eat. We’re goin’ before long.” And as Al sauntered toward the barn, “Muley, ya wanta squeeze in with us an’ go? We’d try to make room for ya.”

Muley took a bite of meat from the edge of a rib bone and chewed it. “Sometimes I think I might. But I know I won’t,” he said. “I know perfectly well the las’ minute I’d run an’ hide like a damn ol’ graveyard ghos’.”

Noah said, “You gonna die out in the fiel’ some day, Muley.”

“I know. I thought about that. Sometimes it seems pretty lonely, an’ sometimes it seems all right, an’ sometimes it seems good. It don’t make no difference. But if ya come acrost my folks—that’s really what I come to say—if ya come on any my folks in California, tell ’em I’m well. Tell ’em I’m doin’ all right. Don’t let on I’m livin’ this way. Tell ’em I’ll come to ’em soon’s I git the money.”

Ma asked, “An’ will ya?”

“No,” Muley said softly. “No, I won’t. I can’t go away. I got to stay now. Time back I might of went. But not now. Fella gits to thinkin’, an’ he gits to knowin’. I ain’t never goin’.”

The light of the dawn was a little sharper now. It paled the

lanterns a little. Al came back with Grampa struggling and limping by his side. “He wasn’t sleepin’,” Al said. “He was settin’ out back of the barn. They’s somepin wrong with ’im.”

Grampa’s eyes had dulled, and there was none of the old meanness in them. “Ain’t nothin’ the matter with me,” he said. “I jus’ ain’t a-goin’.”

“Not goin’?” Pa demanded. “What you mean you ain’t a-goin’? Why, here we’re all packed up, ready. We got to go. We got no place to stay.”

“I ain’t sayin’ for you to stay,” said Grampa. “You go right on along. Me—I’m stayin’. I give her a goin’-over all night mos’ly. This here’s my country. I b’long here. An’ I don’t give a goddamn if they’s oranges an’ grapes crowdin’ a fella outa bed even. I ain’t a-goin’. This country ain’t no good, but it’s my country. No, you all go ahead. I’ll jus’ stay right here where I b’long.”

They crowded near to him. Pa said, “You can’t, Grampa. This here lan’ is goin’ under the tractors. Who’d cook for you? How’d you live? You can’t stay here. Why, with nobody to take care of you, you’d starve.”

Grampa cried, “Goddamn it, I’m a ol’ man, but I can still take care a myself. How’s Muley here get along? I can get along as good as him. I tell ya I ain’t goin’, an’ ya can lump it. Take Granma with ya if ya want, but ya ain’t takin’ me, an’ that’s the end of it.”

Pa said helplessly, “Now listen to me, Grampa. Jus’ listen to me, jus’ a minute.”

“Ain’t a-gonna listen. I tol’ ya what I’m a-gonna do.”

Tom touched his father on the shoulder. “Pa, come in the house. I wanta tell ya somepin.” And as they moved toward the house, he called, “Ma—come here a minute, will ya?”

In the kitchen one lantern burned and the plate of pork bones was still piled high. Tom said, “Listen, I know Grampa got the right to say he ain’t goin’, but he can’t stay. We know that.”

“Sure he can’t stay,” said Pa.

“Well, look. If we got to catch him an’ tie him down, we li’ble to hurt him, an’ he’ll git so mad he’ll hurt himself. Now we can’t argue with him. If we could get him drunk it’d be all right. You got any whisky?”

“No,” said Pa. “There ain’t a drop a’ whisky in the house. An’

John got no whisky. He never has none when he ain't drinkin'."

Ma said, "Tom, I got a half a bottle soothin' sirup I got for Winfiel' when he had them earaches. Think that might work? Use ta put Winfiel' ta sleep when his earache was bad."

"Might," said Tom. "Get it, Ma. We'll give her a try anyways."

"I throwed it out on the trash pile," said Ma. She took the lantern and went out, and in a moment she came back with a bottle half full of black medicine.

Tom took it from her and tasted it. "Don' taste bad," he said. "Make up a cup a black coffee, good an' strong. Le's see—says one teaspoon. Better put in a lot, coupla tablespoons."

Ma opened the stove and put a kettle inside, down next to the coals, and she measured water and coffee into it. "Have to give it to 'im in a can," she said. "We got the cups all packed."

Tom and his father went back outside. "Fella got a right to say what he's gonna do. Say, who's eatin' spareribs?" said Grampa.

"We've et," said Tom. "Ma's fixin' you a cup a coffee an' some pork."

He went into the house, and he drank his coffee and ate his pork. The group outside in the growing dawn watched him quietly, through the door. They saw him yawn and sway, and they saw him put his arms on the table and rest his head on his arms and go to sleep.

"He was tar'd anyways," said Tom. "Leave him be."

Now they were ready. Granma, giddy and vague, saying, "What's all this? What you doin' now, so early?" But she was dressed and agreeable. And Ruthie and Winfield were awake, but quiet with the pressure of tiredness and still half dreaming. The light was sifting rapidly over the land. And the movement of the family stopped. They stood about, reluctant to make the first active move to go. They were afraid, now that the time had come—afraid in the same way Grampa was afraid. They saw the shed take shape against the light, and they saw the lanterns pale until they no longer cast their circles of yellow light. The stars went out, few by few, toward the west. And still the family stood about like dream walkers, their eyes focused panoramically, seeing no detail, but the whole dawn, the whole land, the whole texture of the country at once.

Only Muley Graves prowled about restlessly, looking through the

bars into the truck, thumping the spare tires hung on the back of the truck. And at last Muley approached Tom. “You goin’ over the State line?” he asked. “You gonna break your parole?”

And Tom shook himself free of the numbness. “Jesus Christ, it’s near sunrise,” he said loudly. “We got to get goin’.” And the others came out of their numbness and moved toward the truck.

“Come on,” Tom said. “Le’s get Grampa on.” Pa and Uncle John and Tom and Al went into the kitchen where Grampa slept, his forehead down on his arms, and a line of drying coffee on the table. They took him under the elbows and lifted him to his feet, and he grumbled and cursed thickly, like a drunken man. Out the door they boosted him, and when they came to the truck Tom and Al climbed up, and, leaning over, hooked their hands under his arms and lifted him gently up, and laid him on top of the load. Al untied the tarpaulin, and they rolled him under and put a box under the tarp beside him, so that the weight of the heavy canvas would not be upon him.

“I got to get that ridge pole fixed,” Al said. “Do her tonight when we stop.” Grampa grunted and fought weakly against awakening, and when he was finally settled he went deeply to sleep again.

Pa said, “Ma, you an’ Granma set in with Al for a while. We’ll change aroun’ so it’s easier, but you start out that way.” They got into the cab, and then the rest swarmed up on top of the load, Connie and Rose of Sharon, Pa and Uncle John, Ruthie and Winfield, Tom and the preacher. Noah stood on the ground, looking up at the great load of them sitting on top of the truck.

Al walked around, looking underneath at the springs. “Holy Jesus,” he said, “them springs is flat as hell. Lucky I blocked under ’em.”

Noah said, “How about the dogs, Pa?”

“I forgot the dogs,” Pa said. He whistled shrilly, and one bouncing dog ran in, but only one. Noah caught him and threw him up on the top, where he sat rigid and shivering at the height. “Got to leave the other two,” Pa called. “Muley, will you look after ’em some? See they don’t starve?”

“Yeah,” said Muley. “I’ll like to have a couple dogs. Yeah! I’ll take ’em.”

“Take them chickens, too,” Pa said.

Al got into the driver's seat. The starter whirred and caught, and whirred again. And then the loose roar of the six cylinders and a blue smoke behind. "So long, Muley," Al called.

And the family called, "Good-by, Muley."

Al slipped in the low gear and let in the clutch. The truck shuddered and strained across the yard. And the second gear took hold. They crawled up the little hill, and the red dust arose about them. "Chr-ist, what a load!" said Al. "We ain't makin' no time on this trip."

Ma tried to look back, but the body of the load cut off her view. She straightened her head and peered straight ahead along the dirt road. And a great weariness was in her eyes.

The people on top of the load did look back. They saw the house and the barn and a little smoke still rising from the chimney. They saw the windows reddening under the first color of the sun. They saw Muley standing forlornly in the dooryard looking after them. And then the hill cut them off. The cotton fields lined the road. And the truck crawled slowly through the dust toward the highway and the west.

Chapter 11

The houses were left vacant on the land, and the land was vacant because of this. Only the tractor sheds of corrugated iron, silver and gleaming, were alive; and they were alive with metal and gasoline and oil, the disks of the plows shining. The tractors had lights shining, for there is no day and night for a tractor and the disks turn the earth in the darkness and they glitter in the daylight. And when a horse stops work and goes into the barn there is a life and a vitality left, there is a breathing and a warmth, and the feet shift on the straw, and the jaws champ on the hay, and the ears and the eyes are alive. There is a warmth of life in the barn, and the heat and smell of life. But when the motor of a tractor stops, it is as dead as the ore it came from. The heat goes out of it like the living heat that leaves a corpse. Then the corrugated iron doors are closed and the tractor man drives home to town, perhaps twenty miles away, and he need not come back for weeks or months, for the tractor is dead. And this is easy and efficient. So easy that the wonder goes out of work, so efficient that the wonder goes out of land and the working of it, and with the wonder the deep understanding and the relation. And in the tractor man there grows the contempt that comes only to a stranger who has little understanding and no relation. For nitrates are not the land, nor phosphates; and the length of fiber in the cotton is not the land. Carbon is not a man, nor salt nor water nor calcium. He is all these, but he is much more, much more; and the land is so much more than its analysis. The man who is more than his chemistry, walking on the earth, turning his plow point for a stone, dropping his handles to slide over an outcropping, kneeling in the earth to eat his lunch; that man who is more than his elements knows the land that is more than its analysis. But the machine man, driving a dead tractor on land he does not know and love, understands only chemistry; and he is contemptuous of the land and of himself. When the corrugated iron doors are shut, he goes home, and his home is not the land.

The doors of the empty houses swung open, and drifted back and forth in the wind. Bands of little boys came out from the towns to break the windows and to pick over the debris, looking for

treasures. And here's a knife with half the blade gone. That's a good thing. And—smells like a rat died here. And look what Whitey wrote on the wall. He wrote that in the toilet in school, too, an' teacher made 'im wash it off.

When the folks first left, and the evening of the first day came, the hunting cats slouched in from the fields and mewed on the porch. And when no one came out, the cats crept through the open doors and walked mewing through the empty rooms. And then they went back to the fields and were wild cats from then on, hunting gophers and field mice, and sleeping in ditches in the daytime. When the night came, the bats, which had stopped at the doors for fear of light, swooped into the houses and sailed about through the empty rooms, and in a little while they stayed in dark room corners during the day, folded their wings high, and hung head-down among the rafters, and the smell of their droppings was in the empty houses.

And the mice moved in and stored weed seeds in corners, in boxes, in the backs of drawers in the kitchens. And weasels came in to hunt the mice, and the brown owls flew shrieking in and out again.

Now there came a little shower. The weeds sprang up in front of the doorstep, where they had not been allowed, and grass grew up through the porch boards. The houses were vacant, and a vacant house falls quickly apart. Splits started up the sheathing from the rusted nails. A dust settled on the floors, and only mouse and weasel and cat tracks disturbed it.

On a night the wind loosened a shingle and flipped it to the ground. The next wind pried into the hole where the shingle had been, lifted off three, and the next, a dozen. The midday sun burned through the hole and threw a glaring spot on the floor. The wild cats crept in from the fields at night, but they did not mew at the doorstep any more. They moved like shadows of a cloud across the moon, into the rooms to hunt the mice. And on windy nights the doors banged, and the ragged curtains fluttered in the broken windows.

Chapter 12

Highway 66 is the main migrant road. 66—the long concrete path across the country, waving gently up and down on the map, from the Mississippi to Bakersfield—over the red lands and the gray lands, twisting up into the mountains, crossing the Divide and down into the bright and terrible desert, and across the desert to the mountains again, and into the rich California valleys.

66 is the path of a people in flight, refugees from dust and shrinking land, from the thunder of tractors and shrinking ownership, from the desert's slow northward invasion, from the twisting winds that howl up out of Texas, from the floods that bring no richness to the land and steal what little richness is there. From all of these the people are in flight, and they come into 66 from the tributary side roads, from the wagon tracks and the rutted country roads. 66 is the mother road, the road of flight.

Clarksville and Ozark and Van Buren and Fort Smith on 64, and there's an end of Arkansas. And all the roads into Oklahoma City, 66 down from Tulsa, 270 up from McAlester. 81 from Wichita Falls south, from Enid north. Edmond, McLoud, Purcell. 66 out of Oklahoma City; El Reno and Clinton, going west on 66. Hydro, Elk City, and Texola; and there's an end to Oklahoma. 66 across the Panhandle of Texas. Shamrock and McLean, Conway and Amarillo, the yellow. Wildorado and Vega and Boise, and there's an end of Texas. Tucumcari and Santa Rosa and into the New Mexican mountains to Albuquerque, where the road comes down from Santa Fe. Then down the gorged Rio Grande to Los Lunas and west again on 66 to Gallup, and there's the border of New Mexico.

And now the high mountains. Holbrook and Winslow and Flagstaff in the high mountains of Arizona. Then the great plateau rolling like a ground swell. Ashfork and Kingman and stone mountains again, where water must be hauled and sold. Then out of the broken sun-rotted mountains of Arizona to the Colorado, with green reeds on its banks, and that's the end of Arizona. There's California just over the river, and a pretty town to start it. Needles, on the river. But the river is a stranger in this place. Up from Needles and over a burned range, and there's the desert. And 66 goes on over the terrible desert, where the distance shimmers and

the black center mountains hang unbearably in the distance. At last there's Barstow, and more desert until at last the mountains rise up again, the good mountains, and 66 winds through them. Then suddenly a pass, and below the beautiful valley, below orchards and vineyards and little houses, and in the distance a city. And, oh, my God, it's over.

The people in flight streamed out on 66, sometimes a single car, sometimes a little caravan. All day they rolled slowly along the road, and at night they stopped near water. In the day ancient leaky radiators sent up columns of steam, loose connecting rods hammered and pounded. And the men driving the trucks and the overloaded cars listened apprehensively. How far between towns? It is a terror between towns. If something breaks—well, if something breaks we camp right here while Jim walks to town and gets a part and walks back and—how much food we got?

Listen to the motor. Listen to the wheels. Listen with your ears and with your hands on the steering wheel; listen with the palm of your hand on the gear-shift lever; listen with your feet on the floor boards. Listen to the pounding old jalopy with all your senses; for a change of tone, a variation of rhythm may mean—a week here? That rattle—that's tappets. Don't hurt a bit. Tappets can rattle till Jesus comes again without no harm. But that thudding as the car moves along—can't hear that—just kind of feel it. Maybe oil isn't gettin' someplace. Maybe a bearing's startin' to go. Jesus, if it's a bearing, what'll we do? Money's goin' fast.

And why's the son-of-a-bitch heat up so hot today? This ain't no climb. Le's look. God Almighty, the fan belt's gone! Here, make a belt outa this little piece a rope. Le's see how long—there. I'll splice the ends. Now take her slow—slow, till we can get to a town. That rope belt won't last long.

'F we can on'y get to California where the oranges grow before this here ol' jug blows up. 'F we on'y can.

And the tires—two layers of fabric worn through. On'y a four-ply tire. Might get a hunderd miles more outa her if we don't hit a rock an' blow her. Which'll we take—a hunderd, maybe, miles, or maybe spoil the tube? Which? A hunderd miles. Well, that's somepin you got to think about. We got tube patches. Maybe when she goes she'll only spring a leak. How about makin' a boot? Might get five hunderd more miles. Le's go on till she blows.

We got to get a tire, but, Jesus, they want a lot for a ol' tire. They look a fella over. They know he got to go on. They know he can't wait. And the price goes up.

Take it or leave it. I ain't in business for my health. I'm here a-sellin' tires. I ain't givin' 'em away. I can't help what happens to you. I got to think what happens to me.

How far's the nex' town?

I seen forty-two cars a you fellas go by yesterday. Where you all come from? Where all of you goin'?

Well, California's a big State.

It ain't that big. The whole United States ain't that big. It ain't that big. It ain't big enough. There ain't room enough for you an' me, for your kind an' my kind, for rich and poor together all in one country, for thieves and honest men. For hunger and fat. Whyn't you go back where you come from?

This is a free country. Fella can go where he wants.

That's what *you* think! Ever hear of the border patrol on the California line? Police from Los Angeles—stopped you bastards, turned you back. Says, if you can't buy no real estate we don't want you. Says, got a driver's license? Le's see it. Tore it up. Says you can't come in without no driver's license.

It's a free country.

Well, try to get some freedom to do. Fella says you're jus' as free as you got jack to pay for it.

In California they got high wages. I got a han'bill here tells about it.

Baloney! I seen folks comin' back. Somebody's kiddin' you. You want that tire or don't ya?

Got to take it, but, Jesus, mister, it cuts into our money! We ain't got much left.

Well, I ain't no charity. Take her along.

Got to, I guess. Let's look her over. Open her up, look a' the casing—you son-of-a-bitch, you said the casing was good. She's broke damn near through.

The hell she is. Well—by George! How come I didn' see that?

You did see it, you son-of-a-bitch. You wanta charge us four bucks for a busted casing. I'd like to take a sock at you.

Now keep your shirt on. I didn' see it, I tell you. Here—tell ya what I'll do. I'll give ya this one for three-fifty.

You'll take a flying jump at the moon! We'll try to make the nex' town.

Think we can make it on that tire?

Got to. I'll go on the rim before I'd give that son-of-a-bitch a dime.

What do ya think a guy in business is? Like he says, he ain't in it for his health. That's what business is. What'd you think it was? Fella's got—See that sign 'longside the road there? Service Club. Luncheon Tuesday, Colmado Hotel? Welcome, brother. That's a Service Club. Fella had a story. Went to one of them meetings an' told the story to all them business men. Says, when I was a kid my ol' man give me a haltered heifer an' says take her down an' git her serviced. An' the fella says, I done it, an' ever' time since then when I hear a business man talkin' about service, I wonder who's gettin' screwed. Fella in business got to lie an' cheat, but he calls it somepin else. That's what's important. You go steal that tire an' you're a thief, but he tried to steal your four dollars for a busted tire. They call that sound business.

Danny in the back seat wants a cup a water.

Have to wait. Got no water here.

Listen—that the rear end?

Can't tell.

Sound telegraphs through the frame.

There goes a gasket. Got to go on. Listen to her whistle. Find a nice place to camp an' I'll jerk the head off. But, God Almighty, the food's gettin' low, the money's gettin' low. When we can't buy no more gas—

what then?

Danny in the back seat wants a cup a water. Little fella's thirsty.

Listen to that gasket whistle.

Chee-rist! There she went. Blowed tube an' casing all to hell. Have to fix her. Save that casing to make boots; cut 'em out an' stick 'em inside a weak place.

Cars pulled up beside the road, engine heads off, tires mended. Cars limping along 66 like wounded things, panting and struggling.

Too hot, loose connections, loose bearings, rattling bodies.

Danny wants a cup of water.

People in flight along 66. And the concrete road shone like a mirror under the sun, and in the distance the heat made it seem that there were pools of water in the road.

Danny wants a cup a water.

He'll have to wait, poor little fella. He's hot. Nex' service station. *Service* station, like the fella says.

Two hundred and fifty thousand people over the road. Fifty thousand old cars—wounded, steaming. Wrecks along the road, abandoned. Well, what happened to them? What happened to the folks in that car? Did they walk? Where are they? Where does the courage come from? Where does the terrible faith come from?

And here's a story you can hardly believe, but it's true, and it's funny and it's beautiful. There was a family of twelve and they were forced off the land. They had no car. They built a trailer out of junk and loaded it with their possessions. They pulled it to the side of 66 and waited. And pretty soon a sedan picked them up. Five of them rode in the sedan and seven on the trailer, and a dog on the trailer. They got to California in two jumps. The man who pulled them fed them. And that's true. But how can such courage be, and such faith in their own species? Very few things would teach such faith.

The people in flight from the terror behind—strange things happen to them, some bitterly cruel and some so beautiful that the faith is refired forever.

Chapter 13

The ancient overloaded Hudson creaked and grunted to the highway at Sallisaw and turned west, and the sun was blinding. But on the concrete road Al built up his speed because the flattened springs were not in danger any more. From Sallisaw to Gore is twenty-one miles and the Hudson was doing thirty-five miles an hour. From Gore to Warner thirteen miles; Warner to Checotah fourteen miles; Checotah a long jump to Henrietta—thirty-four miles, but a real town at the end of it. Henrietta to Castle nineteen miles, and the sun was overhead, and the red fields, heated by the high sun, vibrated the air.

Al, at the wheel, his face purposeful, his whole body listening to the car, his restless eyes jumping from the road to the instrument panel. Al was one with his engine, every nerve listening for weaknesses, for the thumps or squeals, hums and chattering that indicate a change that may cause a breakdown. He had become the soul of the car.

Granma, beside him on the seat, half slept, and whimpered in her sleep, opened her eyes to peer ahead, and then dozed again. And Ma sat beside Granma, one elbow out the window, and the skin reddening under the fierce sun. Ma looked ahead too, but her eyes were flat and did not see the road or the fields, the gas stations, the little eating sheds. She did not glance at them as the Hudson went by.

Al shifted himself on the broken seat and changed his grip on the steering wheel. And he sighed, “Makes a racket, but I think she’s awright. God knows what she’ll do if we got to climb a hill with the load we got. Got any hills ’tween here an’ California, Ma?”

Ma turned her head slowly and her eyes came to life. “Seems to me they’s hills,” she said. “’Course I dunno. But seems to me I heard they’s hills an’ even mountains. Big ones.”

Granma drew a long whining sigh in her sleep.

Al said, “We’ll burn right up if we got climbin’ to do. Have to throw out some a’ this stuff. Maybe we shouldn’ a brang that preacher.”

“You’ll be glad a that preacher ’fore we’re through,” said Ma. “That preacher’ll help us.” She looked ahead at the gleaming road

again.

Al steered with one hand and put the other on the vibrating gear-shift lever. He had difficulty in speaking. His mouth formed the words silently before he said them aloud. “Ma —” She looked slowly around at him, her head swaying a little with the car’s motion. “Ma, you scared a goin’? You scared a goin’ to a new place?”

Her eyes grew thoughtful and soft. “A little,” she said. “Only it ain’t like scared so much. I’m jus’ a settin’ here waitin’. When somepin happens that I got to do somepin—I’ll do it.”

“Ain’t you thinkin’ what’s it gonna be like when we get there? Ain’t you scared it won’t be nice like we thought?”

“No,” she said quickly. “No, I ain’t. You can’t do that. I can’t do that. It’s too much—livin’ too many lives. Up ahead they’s a thousan’ lives we might live, but when it comes, it’ll on’y be one. If I go ahead on all of ’em, it’s too much. You got to live ahead ’cause you’re so young, but—it’s jus’ the road goin’ by for me. An’ it’s jus’ how soon they gonna wanta eat some more pork bones.” Her face tightened. “That’s all I can do. I can’t do no more. All the rest’d get upset if I done any more’n that. They all depen’ on me jus’ thinkin’ about that.”

Granma yawned shrilly and opened her eyes. She looked wildly about. “I got to get out, praise Gawd,” she said.

“First clump a brush,” said Al. “They’s one up ahead.”

“Brush or no brush, I got to git out, I tell ya.” And she began to whine, “I got to git out. I got to git out.”

Al speeded up, and when he came to the low brush he pulled up short. Ma threw the door open and half pulled the struggling old lady out beside the road and into the bushes. And Ma held her so Granma would not fall when she squatted.

On top of the truck the others stirred to life. Their faces were shining with sunburn they could not escape. Tom and Casy and Noah and Uncle John let themselves wearily down. Ruthie and Winfield swarmed down the side-boards and went off into the bushes. Connie helped Rose of Sharon gently down. Under the canvas, Grampa was awake, his head sticking out, but his eyes were drugged and watery and still senseless. He watched the others, but there was little recognition in his watching.

Tom called to him, “Want to come down, Grampa?”

The old eyes turned listlessly to him. “No,” said Grampa. For a moment the fierceness came into his eyes. “I ain’t a-goin’, I tell you. Gonna stay like Muley.” And then he lost interest again. Ma came back, helping Granma up the bank to the highway.

“Tom,” she said. “Get that pan a bones, under the canvas in back. We got to eat somepin.” Tom got the pan and passed it around, and the family stood by the roadside, gnawing the crisp particles from the pork bones.

“Sure lucky we brang these along,” said Pa. “Git so stiff up there can’t hardly move. Where’s the water?”

“Ain’t it up with you?” Ma asked. “I set out that gallon jug.”

Pa climbed the sides and looked under the canvas. “It ain’t here. We must a forgot it.”

Thirst set in instantly. Winfield moaned, “I wanta drink. I wanta drink.” The men licked their lips, suddenly conscious of their thirst. And a little panic started.

Al felt the fear growing. “We’ll get water first service station we come to. We need some gas too.” The family swarmed up the truck sides; Ma helped Granma in and got in beside her. Al started the motor and they moved on.

Castle to Paden twenty-five miles and the sun passed the zenith and started down. And the radiator cap began to jiggle up and down and steam started to whish out. Near Paden there was a shack beside the road and two gas pumps in front of it; and beside a fence, a water faucet and a hose. Al drove in and nosed the Hudson up to the hose. As they pulled in, a stout man, red of face and arms, got up from a chair behind the gas pumps and moved toward them. He wore brown corduroys, and suspenders and a polo shirt; and he had a cardboard sun helmet, painted silver, on his head. The sweat beaded on his nose and under his eyes and formed streams in the wrinkles of his neck. He strolled toward the truck, looking truculent and stern.

“You folks aim to buy anything? Gasoline or stuff ?” he asked.

Al was out already, unscrewing the steaming radiator cap with the tips of his fingers, jerking his hand away to escape the spurt when the cap should come loose. “Need some gas, mister.”

“Got any money?”

“Sure. Think we’re beggin’?”

The truculence left the fat man’s face. “Well, that’s all right, folks. He’p yourself to water.” And he hastened to explain. “Road is full a people, come in, use water, dirty up the toilet, an’ then, by God, they’ll steal stuff an’ don’t buy nothin’. Got no money to buy with. Come beggin’ a gallon gas to move on.”

Tom dropped angrily to the ground and moved toward the fat man. “We’re payin’ our way,” he said fiercely. “You got no call to give us a goin’-over. We ain’t asked you for nothin’.”

“I ain’t,” the fat man said quickly. The sweat began to soak through his short-sleeved polo shirt. “Jus’ he’p yourself to water, and go use the toilet if you want.”

Winfield had got the hose. He drank from the end and then turned the stream over his head and face, and emerged dripping. “It ain’t cool,” he said.

“I don’ know what the country’s comin’ to,” the fat man continued. His complaint had shifted now and he was no longer talking to or about the Joads. “Fifty-sixty cars a folks go by ever’ day, folks all movin’ west with kids an’ househol’ stuff. Where they goin’? What they gonna do?”

“Doin’ the same as us,” said Tom. “Goin’ someplace to live. Tryin’ to get along. That’s all.”

“Well, I don’ know what the country’s comin’ to. I jus’ don’ know. Here’s me tryin’ to get along, too. Think any them big new cars stops here? No, sir! They go on to them yella-painted company stations in town. They don’t stop no place like this. Most folks stops here ain’t got nothin’.”

Al flipped the radiator cap and it jumped into the air with a head of steam behind it, and a hollow bubbling sound came out of the radiator. On top of the truck, the suffering hound dog crawled timidly to the edge of the load and looked over, whimpering, toward the water. Uncle John climbed up and lifted him down by the scruff of the neck. For a moment the dog staggered on stiff legs, and then he went to lap the mud under the faucet. In the highway the cars whizzed by, glistening in the heat, and the hot wind of their going fanned into the service-station yard. Al filled the radiator with the hose.

“It ain’t that I’m tryin’ to git trade outa rich folks,” the fat man

went on. “I’m jus’ tryin’ to git trade. Why, the folks that stops here begs gasoline an’ they trades for gasoline. I could show you in my back room the stuff they’ll trade for gas an’ oil: beds an’ baby buggies an’ pots an’ pans. One family traded a doll their kid had for a gallon. An’ what’m I gonna do with the stuff, open a junk shop? Why, one fella wanted to gimme his shoes for a gallon. An’ if I was that kinda fella I bet I could git —” He glanced at Ma and stopped.

Jim Casy had wet his head, and the drops still coursed down his high forehead, and his muscled neck was wet, and his shirt was wet. He moved over beside Tom. “It ain’t the people’s fault,” he said. “How’d you like to sell the bed you sleep on for a tankful a gas?”

“I know it ain’t their fault. Ever’ person I talked to is on the move for a damn good reason. But what’s the country comin’ to? That’s what I wanta know. What’s it comin’ to? Fella can’t make a livin’ no more. Folks can’t make a livin’ farmin’. I ask you, what’s it comin’ to? I can’t figure her out. Ever’body I ask, they can’t figure her out. Fella wants to trade his shoes so he can git a hunderd miles on. I can’t figure her out.” He took off his silver hat and wiped his forehead with his palm. And Tom took off his cap and wiped his forehead with it. He went to the hose and wet the cap through and squeezed it and put it on again. Ma worked a tin cup out through the side bars of the truck, and she took water to Granma and to Grampa on top of the load. She stood on the bars and handed the cup to Grampa, and he wet his lips, and then shook his head and refused more. The old eyes looked up at Ma in pain and bewilderment for a moment before the awareness receded again.

Al started the motor and backed the truck to the gas pump. “Fill her up. She’ll take about seven,” said Al. “We’ll give her six so she don’t spill none.”

The fat man put the hose in the tank. “No, sir,” he said. “I jus’ don’t know what the country’s comin’ to. Relief an’ all.”

Casy said, “I been walkin’ aroun’ in the country. Ever’body’s askin’ that. What we comin’ to? Seems to me we don’t never come to nothin’. Always on the way. Always goin’ and goin’. Why don’t folks think about that? They’s movement now. People moving. We know why, an’ we know how. Movin’ ’cause they got to. That’s why folks always move. Movin’ ’cause they want somepin better’n what they got. An’ that’s the on’y way they’ll ever git it. Wantin’ it an’ needin’ it, they’ll go out an’ git it. It’s bein’ hurt that makes folks

mad to fightin'. I been walkin' aroun' the country, an' hearin' folks talk like you."

The fat man pumped the gasoline and the needle turned on the pump dial, recording the amount. "Yeah, but what's it comin' to? That's what I want ta know."

Tom broke in irritably, "Well, you ain't never gonna know. Casy tries to tell ya an' you jest ast the same thing over. I seen fellas like you before. You ain't askin' nothin'; you're jus' singin' a kinda song. 'What we comin' to?' You don' wanta know. Country's movin' aroun', goin' places. They's folks dyin' all aroun'. Maybe you'll die pretty soon, but you won't know nothin'. I seen too many fellas like you. You don't want to know nothin'. Just sing yourself to sleep with a song—'What we comin' to?'" He looked at the gas pump, rusted and old, and at the shack behind it, built of old lumber, the nail holes of its first use still showing through the paint that had been brave, the brave yellow paint that had tried to imitate the big company stations in town. But the paint couldn't cover the old nail holes and the old cracks in the lumber, and the paint could not be renewed. The imitation was a failure and the owner had known it was a failure. And inside the open door of the shack Tom saw the oil barrels, only two of them, and the candy counter with stale candies and licorice whips turning brown with age, and cigarettes. He saw the broken chair and the fly screen with a rusted hole in it. And the littered yard that should have been graveled, and behind, the corn field drying and dying in the sun. Beside the house the little stock of used tires and retreaded tires. And he saw for the first time the fat man's cheap washed pants and his cheap polo shirt and his paper hat. He said, "I didn' mean to sound off at ya, mister. It's the heat. You ain't got nothin'. Pretty soon you'll be on the road yourse'f. And it ain't tractors'll put you there. It's them pretty yella stations in town. Folks is movin'," he said ashamedly. "An' you'll be movin', mister."

The fat man's hand slowed on the pump and stopped while Tom spoke. He looked worriedly at Tom. "How'd you know?" he asked helplessly. "How'd you know we was already talkin' about packin' up an' movin' west?"

Casy answered him. "It's ever'body," he said. "Here's me that used to give all my fight against the devil 'cause I figgered the devil was the enemy. But they's somepin worse'n the devil got hold a the

country, an' it ain't gonna let go till it's chopped loose. Ever see one a them Gila monsters take hold, mister? Grabs hold, an' you chop him in two an' his head hangs on. Chop him at the neck an' his head hangs on. Got to take a screw-driver an' pry his head apart to git him loose. An' while he's layin' there, poison is drippin' an' drippin' into the hole he's made with his teeth." He stopped and looked sideways at Tom.

The fat man stared hopelessly straight ahead. His hand started turning the crank slowly. "I dunno what we're comin' to," he said softly.

Over by the water hose, Connie and Rose of Sharon stood together, talking secretly. Connie washed the tin cup and felt the water with his finger before he filled the cup again. Rose of Sharon watched the cars go by on the highway. Connie held out the cup to her. "This water ain't cool, but it's wet," he said.

She looked at him and smiled secretly. She was all secrets now she was pregnant, secrets and little silences that seemed to have meanings. She was pleased with herself, and she complained about things that didn't really matter. And she demanded services of Connie that were silly, and both of them knew they were silly. Connie was pleased with her too, and filled with wonder that she was pregnant. He liked to think he was in on the secrets she had. When she smiled slyly, he smiled slyly too, and they exchanged confidences in whispers. The world had drawn close around them, and they were in the center of it, or rather Rose of Sharon was in the center of it with Connie making a small orbit about her. Everything they said was a kind of secret.

She drew her eyes from the highway. "I ain't very thirsty," she said daintily. "But maybe I *ought* to drink."

And he nodded, for he knew well what she meant. She took the cup and rinsed her mouth and spat and then drank the cupful of tepid water. "Want another?" he asked.

"Jus' a half." And so he filled the cup just half, and gave it to her. A Lincoln Zephyr, silvery and low, whisked by. She turned to see where the others were and saw them clustered about the truck. Reassured, she said, "How'd you like to be goin' along in that?"

Connie sighed, "Maybe—after." They both knew what he meant. "An' if they's plenty work in California, we'll git our own car. But them"—he indicated the disappearing Zephyr—"them kind costs as

much as a good size house. I ruther have the house."

"I like to have the house *an'* one a them," she said. "But 'course the house would be first because —" And they both knew what she meant. They were terribly excited about the pregnancy.

"You feel awright?" he asked.

"Tar'd. Jus' tar'd ridin' in the sun."

"We *got* to do that or we won't never get to California."

"I know," she said.

The dog wandered, sniffing, past the truck, trotted to the puddle under the hose again and lapped at the muddy water. And then he moved away, nose down and ears hanging. He sniffed his way among the dusty weeds beside the road, to the edge of the pavement. He raised his head and looked across, and then started over. Rose of Sharon screamed shrilly. A big swift car whisked near, tires squealed. The dog dodged helplessly, and with a shriek, cut off in the middle, went under the wheels. The big car slowed for a moment and faces looked back, and then it gathered greater speed and disappeared. And the dog, a blot of blood and tangled, burst intestines, kicked slowly in the road.

Rose of Sharon's eyes were wide. "D'you think it'll hurt?" she begged. "Think it'll hurt?"

Connie put his arm around her. "Come set down," he said. "It wasn't nothin'."

"But I felt it hurt. I felt it kinda jar when I yelled."

"Come set down. It wasn't nothin'. It won't hurt." He led her to the side of the truck away from the dying dog and sat her down on the running board.

Tom and Uncle John walked out to the mess. The last quiver was going out of the crushed body. Tom took it by the legs and dragged it to the side of the road. Uncle John look embarrassed, as though it were his fault. "I ought ta tied him up," he said.

Pa looked down at the dog for a moment and then he turned away. "Le's get outa here," he said. "I don't know how we was gonna feed 'im anyways. Just as well, maybe."

The fat man came from behind the truck. "I'm sorry, folks," he said. "A dog jus' don' last no time near a highway. I had three dogs run over in a year. Don't keep none, no more." And he said, "Don't you folks worry none about it. I'll take care of 'im. Bury 'im out in

the corn field."

Ma walked over to Rose of Sharon, where she sat, still shuddering, on the running board. "You all right, Rosasharn?" she asked. "You feelin' poorly?"

"I seen that. Give me a start."

"I heard ya yip," said Ma. "Git yourself laced up, now."

"You suppose it might of hurt?"

"No," said Ma. "'F you go to greasin' yourself an' feelin' sorry, an' tuckin' yourself in a swalla's nest, it might. Rise up now, an' he'p me get Granma comf 'table. Forget that baby for a minute. He'll take care a hisself."

"Where is Granma?" Rose of Sharon asked.

"I dunno. She's aroun' here somewheres. Maybe in the outhouse."

The girl went toward the toilet, and in a moment she came out, helping Granma along. "She went to sleep in there," said Rose of Sharon.

Granma grinned. "It's nice in there," she said. "They got a patent toilet in there an' the water comes down. I like it in there," she said contentedly. "Would of took a good nap if I wasn't woke up."

"It ain't a nice place to sleep," said Rose of Sharon, and she helped Granma into the car. Granma settled herself happily. "Maybe it ain't nice for purty, but it's nice for nice," she said.

Tom said, "Le's go. We got to make miles."

Pa whistled shrilly. "Now where'd them kids go?" He whistled again, putting his fingers in his mouth.

In a moment they broke from the corn field, Ruthie ahead and Winfield trailing her. "Eggs!" Ruthie cried. "I got sof' eggs." She rushed close, with Winfield close behind. "Look!" A dozen soft, grayish-white eggs were in her grubby hand. And as she held up her hand, her eyes fell upon the dead dog beside the road. "Oh!" she said. Ruthie and Winfield walked slowly toward the dog. They inspected him.

Pa called to them, "Come on, you, 'less you want to git left."

They turned solemnly and walked to the truck. Ruthie looked once more at the gray reptile eggs in her hand, and then she threw them away. They climbed up the side of the truck. "His eyes was still open," said Ruthie in a hushed tone.

But Winfield gloried in the scene. He said boldly, “His guts was just strowed all over—all over”—he was silent for a moment —“strowed—all—over,” he said, and then he rolled over quickly and vomited down the side of the truck. When he sat up again his eyes were watery and his nose running. “It ain’t like killin’ pigs,” he said in explanation.

Al had the hood of the Hudson up, and he checked the oil level. He brought a gallon can from the floor of the front seat and poured a quantity of cheap black oil into the pipe and checked the level again.

Tom came beside him. “Want I should take her a piece?” he asked.

“I ain’t tired,” said Al.

“Well, you didn’ get no sleep las’ night. I took a snooze this morning. Get up there on top. I’ll take her.”

“Awright,” Al said reluctantly. “But watch the oil gauge pretty close. Take her slow. An’ I been watchin’ for a short. Take a look a the needle now an’ then. ’F she jumps to discharge it’s a short. An’ take her slow, Tom. She’s overloaded.”

Tom laughed. “I’ll watch her,” he said. “You can res’ easy.”

The family piled on top of the truck again. Ma settled herself beside Granma in the seat, and Tom took his place and started the motor. “Sure is loose,” he said, and he put it in gear and pulled away down the highway.

The motor droned along steadily and the sun receded down the sky in front of them. Granma slept steadily, and even Ma dropped her head forward and dozed. Tom pulled his cap over his eyes to shut out the blinding sun.

Paden to Meeker is thirteen miles; Meeker to Harrah is fourteen miles; and then Oklahoma City—the big city. Tom drove straight on. Ma waked up and looked at the streets as they went through the city. And the family, on top of the truck, stared about at the stores, at the big houses, at the office buildings. And then the buildings grew smaller and the stores smaller. The wrecking yards and hot-dog stands, the out-city dance halls.

Ruthie and Winfield saw it all, and it embarrassed them with its bigness and its strangeness, and it frightened them with the fine-clothed people they saw. They did not speak of it to each other.

Later—they would, but not now. They saw the oil derricks in the town, on the edge of the town; oil derricks black, and the smell of oil and gas in the air. But they didn't exclaim. It was so big and so strange it frightened them.

In the street Rose of Sharon saw a man in a light suit. He wore white shoes and a flat straw hat. She touched Connie and indicated the man with her eyes, and then Connie and Rose of Sharon giggled softly to themselves, and the giggles got the best of them. They covered their mouths. And it felt so good that they looked for other people to giggle at. Ruthie and Winfield saw them giggling and it looked such fun that they tried to do it too—but they couldn't. The giggles wouldn't come. But Connie and Rose of Sharon were breathless and red with stifling laughter before they could stop. It got so bad that they had only to look at each other to start over again.

The outskirts were wide spread. Tom drove slowly and carefully in the traffic, and then they were on 66—the great western road, and the sun was sinking on the line of the road. The windshield was bright with dust. Tom pulled his cap lower over his eyes, so low that he had to tilt his head back to see out at all. Granma slept on, the sun on her closed eyelids, and the veins on her temples were blue, and the little bright veins on her cheeks were wine-colored, and the old brown marks on her face turned darker.

Tom said, "We stay on this road right straight through."

Ma had been silent for a long time. "Maybe we better fin' a place to stop 'fore sunset," she said. "I got to get some pork a-boilin' an' some bread made. That takes time."

"Sure," Tom agreed. "We ain't gonna make this trip in one jump. Might's well stretch ourselves."

Oklahoma City to Bethany is fourteen miles.

Tom said, "I think we better stop 'fore the sun goes down. Al got to build that thing on the top. Sun'll kill the folks up there."

Ma had been dozing again. Her head jerked upright. "Got to get some supper a-cookin'," she said. And she said, "Tom, your pa tol' me about you crossin' the State line——"

He was a long time answering. "Yeah? What about it, Ma?"

"Well, I'm scairt about it. It'll make you kinda runnin' away. Maybe they'll catch ya."

Tom held his hand over his eyes to protect himself from the lowering sun. “Don’t you worry,” he said. “I figgered her out. They’s lots a fellas out on parole an’ they’s more goin’ in all the time. If I get caught for anything else out west, well, then they got my pitcher an’ my prints in Washington. They’ll sen’ me back. But if I don’t do no crimes, they won’t give a damn.”

“Well, I’m a-scairt about it. Sometimes you do a crime, an’ you don’t even know it’s bad. Maybe they got crimes in California we don’t even know about. Maybe you gonna do somepin an’ it’s all right, an’ in California it ain’t all right.”

“Be jus’ the same if I wasn’t on parole,” he said. “On’y if I get caught I get a bigger jolt’n other folks. Now you quit a-worryin’,” he said. “We got plenty to worry about ’thout you figgerin’ out things to worry about.”

“I can’t he’p it,” she said. “Minute you cross the line you done a crime.”

“Well, tha’s better’n stickin’ aroun’ Sallisaw an’ starvin’ to death,” he said. “We better look out for a place to stop.”

They went through Bethany and out on the other side. In a ditch, where a culvert went under the road, an old touring car was pulled off the highway and a little tent was pitched beside it, and smoke came out of a stove pipe through the tent. Tom pointed ahead. “There’s some folks campin’. Looks like as good a place as we seen.” He slowed his motor and pulled to a stop beside the road. The hood of the old touring car was up, and a middle-aged man stood looking down at the motor. He wore a cheap straw sombrero, a blue shirt, and a black, spotted vest, and his jeans were stiff and shiny with dirt. His face was lean, the deep cheek-lines great furrows down his face so that his cheek bones and chin stood out sharply. He looked up at the Joad truck and his eyes were puzzled and angry.

Tom leaned out of the window. “Any law ’gainst folks stoppin’ here for the night?”

The man had seen only the truck. His eyes focused down on Tom. “I dunno,” he said. “We on’y stopped here ’cause we couldn’ git no further.”

“Any water here?”

The man pointed to a service-station shack about a quarter of a mile ahead. “They’s water there they’ll let ya take a bucket of.”

Tom hesitated. “Well, ya ’spose we could camp down ’longside?”

The lean man looked puzzled. “We don’t own it,” he said. “We on’y stopped here ’cause this goddamn ol’ trap wouldn’ go no further.”

Tom insisted. “Anyways you’re here an’ we ain’t. You got a right to say if you wan’ neighbors or not.”

The appeal to hospitality had an instant effect. The lean face broke into a smile. “Why, sure, come on off the road. Proud to have ya.” And he called, “Sairy, there’s some folks goin’ ta stay with us. Come on out an’ say how d’ya do. Sairy ain’t well,” he added. The tent flaps opened and a wizened woman came out—a face wrinkled as a dried leaf and eyes that seemed to flame in her face, black eyes that seemed to look out of a well of horror. She was small and shuddering. She held herself upright by a tent flap, and the hand holding onto the canvas was a skeleton covered with wrinkled skin.

When she spoke her voice had a beautiful low timbre, soft and modulated, and yet with ringing overtones. “Tell ’em welcome,” she said. “Tell ’em good an’ welcome.”

Tom drove off the road and brought his truck into the field and lined it up with the touring car. And people boiled down from the truck; Ruthie and Winfield too quickly, so that their legs gave way and they shrieked at the pins and needles that ran through their limbs. Ma went quickly to work. She untied the three-gallon bucket from the back of the truck and approached the squealing children. “Now you go git water—right down there. Ask nice. Say, ‘Please, kin we git a bucket a water?’ and say, ‘Thank you.’ An’ carry it back together helpin’, an’ don’t spill none. An’ if you see stick wood to burn, bring it on.” The children stamped away toward the shack.

By the tent a little embarrassment had set in, and social intercourse had paused before it started. Pa said, “You ain’t Oklahomy folks?”

And Al, who stood near the car, looked at the license plates. “Kansas,” he said.

The lean man said, “Galena, or right about there. Wilson, Ivy Wilson.”

“We’re Joads,” said Pa. “We come from right near Sallisaw.”

“Well, we’re proud to meet you folks,” said Ivy Wilson. “Sairy, these is Joads.”

“I knowed you wasn’t Oklahomy folks. You talk queer, kinda—that ain’t no blame, you understan’.”

“Ever’body says words different,” said Ivy. “Arkansas folks says ’em different, and Oklahomy folks says ’em different. And we seen a lady from Massachusetts, an’ she said ’em differentest of all. Couldn’ hardly make out what she was sayin’.”

Noah and Uncle John and the preacher began to unload the truck. They helped Grampa down and sat him on the ground and he sat limply, staring ahead of him. “You sick, Grampa?” Noah asked.

“You goddamn right,” said Grampa weakly. “Sicker’n hell.”

Sairy Wilson walked slowly and carefully toward him. “How’d you like ta come in our tent?” she asked. “You kin lay down on our mattress an’ rest.”

He looked up at her, drawn by her soft voice. “Come on now,” she said. “You’ll git some rest. We’ll he’p you over.”

Without warning Grampa began to cry. His chin wavered and his old lips tightened over his mouth and he sobbed hoarsely. Ma rushed over to him and put her arms around him. She lifted him to his feet, her broad back straining, and she half lifted, half helped him into the tent.

Uncle John said, “He must be good an’ sick. He ain’t never done that before. Never seen him blubberin’ in my life.” He jumped up on the truck and tossed a mattress down.

Ma came out of the tent and went to Casy. “You been aroun’ sick people,” she said. “Grampa’s sick. Won’t you go take a look at him?”

Casy walked quickly to the tent and went inside. A double mattress was on the ground, the blankets spread neatly; and a little tin stove stood on iron legs, and the fire in it burned unevenly. A bucket of water, a wooden box of supplies, and a box for a table, that was all. The light of the setting sun came pinkly through the tent walls. Sairy Wilson knelt on the ground, beside the mattress, and Grampa lay on his back. His eyes were open, staring upward, and his cheeks were flushed. He breathed heavily.

Casy took the skinny old wrist in his fingers. “Feeling kinda tired, Grampa?” he asked. The staring eyes moved toward his voice but did not find him. The lips practiced a speech but did not speak it. Casy felt the pulse and he dropped the wrist and put his hand on

Grampa's forehead. A struggle began in the old man's body, his legs moved restlessly and his hands stirred. He said a whole string of blurred sounds that were not words, and his face was red under the spiky white whiskers.

Sairy Wilson spoke softly to Casy. "Know what's wrong?"

He looked up at the wrinkled face and the burning eyes. "Do you?"

"I—think so."

"What?" Casy asked.

"Might be wrong. I wouldn' like to say."

Casy looked back at the twitching red face. "Would you say—maybe—he's workin' up a stroke?"

"I'd say that," said Sairy. "I seen it three times before."

From outside came the sounds of camp-making, wood chopping, and the rattle of pans. Ma looked through the flaps. "Granma wants to come in. Would she better?"

The preacher said, "She'll jus' fret if she don't."

"Think he's awright?" Ma asked.

Casy shook his head slowly. Ma looked quickly down at the struggling old face with blood pounding through it. She drew outside and her voice came through. "He's awright, Granma. He's jus' takin' a little res'."

And Granma answered sulkily, "Well, I want ta see him. He's a tricky devil. He wouldn't never let ya know." And she came scurrying through the flaps. She stood over the mattresses and looked down. "What's the matter'th you?" she demanded of Grampa. And again his eyes reached toward her voice and his lips writhed. "He's sulkin'," said Granma. "I tol' you he was tricky. He was gonna sneak away this mornin' so he wouldn't have to come. An' then his hip got a-hurtin'," she said disgustedly. "He's jus' sulkin'. I seen him when he wouldn' talk to nobody before."

Casy said gently, "He ain't sulkin', Granma. He's sick."

"Oh!" She looked down at the old man again. "Sick bad, you think?"

"Purty bad, Granma."

For a moment she hesitated uncertainly. "Well," she said quickly, "why ain't you prayin'? You're a preacher, ain't you?"

Casy's strong fingers blundered over to Grampa's wrist and clasped around it. "I tol' you, Granma. I ain't a preacher no more."

"Pray anyway," she ordered. "You know all the stuff by heart."

"I can't," said Casy. "I don' know what to pray for or who to pray to."

Granma's eyes wandered away and came to rest on Sairy. "He won't pray," she said. "D'I ever tell ya how Ruthie prayed when she was a little skinner? Says, 'Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. An' when she got there the cupboard was bare, an' so the poor dog got none. Amen.' That's jus' what she done." The shadow of someone walking between the tent and the sun crossed the canvas.

Grampa seemed to be struggling; all his muscles twitched. And suddenly he jarred as though under a heavy blow. He lay still and his breath was stopped. Casy looked down at the old man's face and saw that it was turning a blackish purple. Sairy touched Casy's shoulder. She whispered, "His tongue, his tongue, his tongue."

Casy nodded. "Get in front a Granma." He pried the tight jaws apart and reached into the old man's throat for the tongue. And as he lifted it clear, a rattling breath came out, and a sobbing breath was indrawn. Casy found a stick on the ground and held down the tongue with it, and the uneven breath rattled in and out.

Granma hopped about like a chicken. "Pray," she said. "Pray, you. Pray, I tell ya." Sairy tried to hold her back. "Pray, goddamn you!" Granma cried.

Casy looked up at her for a moment. The rasping breath came louder and more unevenly. "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name——"

"Glory!" shouted Granma.

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done—on earth—as it is in Heaven."

"Amen."

A long gasping sigh came from the open mouth, and then a crying release of air.

"Give us this day—our daily bread—and forgive us —" The breathing had stopped. Casy looked down into Grampa's eyes and they were clear and deep and penetrating, and there was a knowing serene look in them.

“Hallelujah!” said Granma. “Go on.”

“Amen,” said Casy.

Granma was still then. And outside the tent all the noise had stopped. A car whished by on the highway. Casy still knelt on the floor beside the mattress. The people outside were listening, standing quietly intent on the sounds of dying. Sairy took Granma by the arm and led her outside, and Granma moved with dignity and held her head high. She walked for the family and held her head straight for the family. Sairy took her to a mattress lying on the ground and sat her down on it. And Granma looked straight ahead, proudly, for she was on show now. The tent was still, and at last Casy spread the tent flaps with his hands and stepped out.

Pa asked softly, “What was it?”

“Stroke,” said Casy. “A good quick stroke.”

Life began to move again. The sun touched the horizon and flattened over it. And along the highway there came a long line of huge freight trucks with red sides. They rumbled along, putting a little earthquake in the ground, and the standing exhaust pipes sputtered blue smoke from the Diesel oil. One man drove each truck, and his relief man slept in a bunk high up against the ceiling. But the trucks never stopped; they thundered day and night and the ground shook under their heavy march.

The family became a unit. Pa squatted down on the ground, and Uncle John beside him. Pa was the head of the family now. Ma stood behind him. Noah and Tom and Al squatted, and the preacher sat down, and then reclined on his elbow. Connie and Rose of Sharon walked at a distance. Now Ruthie and Winfield, clattering up with a bucket of water held between them, felt the change, and they slowed up and set down the bucket and moved quietly to stand with Ma.

Granma sat proudly, coldly, until the group was formed, until no one looked at her, and then she lay down and covered her face with her arm. The red sun set and left a shining twilight on the land, so that faces were bright in the evening and eyes shone in reflection of the sky. The evening picked up light where it could.

Pa said, “It was in Mr. Wilson’s tent.”

Uncle John nodded. “He loaned his tent.”

“Fine friendly folks,” Pa said softly.

Wilson stood by his broken car, and Sairy had gone to the mattress to sit beside Granma, but Sairy was careful not to touch her.

Pa called, “Mr. Wilson!” The man scuffed near and squatted down, and Sairy came and stood beside him. Pa said, “We’re thankful to you folks.”

“We’re proud to help,” said Wilson.

“We’re beholden to you,” said Pa.

“There’s no beholden in a time of dying,” said Wilson, and Sairy echoed him, “Never no beholden.”

Al said, “I’ll fix your car—me an’ Tom will.” And Al looked proud that he could return the family’s obligation.

“We could use some help.” Wilson admitted the retiring of the obligation.

Pa said, “We got to figger what to do. They’s laws. You got to report a death, an’ when you do that, they either take forty dollars for the undertaker or they take him for a pauper.”

Uncle John broke in, “We never did have no paupers.”

Tom said, “Maybe we got to learn. We never got booted off no land before, neither.”

“We done it clean,” said Pa. “There can’t no blame be laid on us. We never took nothin’ we couldn’ pay; we never suffered no man’s charity. When Tom here got in trouble we could hold up our heads. He only done what any man would a done.”

“Then what’ll we do?” Uncle John asked.

“We go in like the law says an’ they’ll come out for him. We on’y got a hundred an’ fifty dollars. They take forty to bury Grampa an’ we won’t get to California—or else they’ll bury him a pauper.” The men stirred restively, and they studied the darkening ground in front of their knees.

Pa said softly, “Grampa buried his pa with his own hand, done it in dignity, an’ shaped the grave nice with his own shovel. That was a time when a man had the right to be buried by his own son an’ a son had the right to bury his own father.”

“The law says different now,” said Uncle John.

“Sometimes the law can’t be foller’d no way,” said Pa. “Not in decency, anyways. They’s lots a times you can’t. When Floyd was

loose an' goin' wild, law said we got to give him up—an' nobody give him up. Sometimes a fella got to sift the law. I'm sayin' now I got the right to bury my own pa. Anybody got somepin to say?"

The preacher rose high on his elbow. "Law changes," he said, "but 'got to's' go on. You got the right to do what you got to do."

Pa turned to Uncle John. "It's your right too, John. You got any word against?"

"No word against," said Uncle John. "On'y it's like hidin' him in the night. Grampa's way was t'come out a-shootin'."

Pa said ashamedly, "We can't do like Grampa done. We got to get to California 'fore our money gives out."

Tom broke in, "Sometimes fellas workin' dig up a man an' then they raise hell an' figger he been killed. The gov'ment's got more interest in a dead man than a live one. They'll go hell-scrapin' tryin' to fin' out who he was and how he died. I offer we put a note of writin' in a bottle an' lay it with Grampa, tellin' who he is an' how he died, an' why he's buried here."

Pa nodded agreement. "Tha's good. Wrote out in a nice han' Be not so lonesome too, knowin' his name is there with 'im, not jus' a old fella lonesome underground. Any more stuff to say?" The circle was silent.

Pa turned his head to Ma. "You'll lay 'im out?"

"I'll lay 'im out," said Ma. "But who's to get supper?"

Sairy Wilson said, "I'll get supper. You go right ahead. Me an' that big girl of yourn."

"We sure thank you," said Ma. "Noah, you get into them kegs an' bring out some nice pork. Salt won't be deep in it yet, but it'll be right nice eatin'."

"We got a half sack a potatoes," said Sairy.

Ma said, "Gimme two half-dollars." Pa dug in his pocket and gave her the silver. She found the basin, filled it full of water, and went into the tent. It was nearly dark in there. Sairy came in and lighted a candle and stuck it upright on a box and then she went out. For a moment Ma looked down at the dead old man. And then in pity she tore a strip from her own apron and tied up his jaw. She straightened his limbs, folded his hands over his chest. She held his eyelids down and laid a silver piece on each one. She buttoned his shirt and washed his face.

Sairy looked in, saying, “Can I give you any help?”

Ma looked slowly up. “Come in,” she said. “I like to talk to ya.”

“That’s a good big girl you got,” said Sairy. “She’s right in peelin’ potatoes. What can I do to help?”

“I was gonna wash Grampa all over,” said Ma, “but he got no other clo’es to put on. An’ ’course your quilt’s spoilt. Can’t never get the smell a death from a quilt. I seen a dog growl an’ shake at a mattress my ma died on, an’ that was two years later. We’ll wrop ’im in your quilt. We’ll make it up to you. We got a quilt for you.”

Sairy said, “You shouldn’ talk like that. We’re proud to help. I ain’t felt so—safe in a long time. People needs—to help.”

Ma nodded. “They do,” she said. She looked long into the old whiskery face, with its bound jaw and silver eyes shining in the candlelight. “He ain’t gonna look natural. We’ll wrop him up.”

“The ol’ lady took it good.”

“Why, she’s so old,” said Ma, “maybe she don’t even rightly know what happened. Maybe she won’t really know for quite a while. Besides, us folks takes a pride holdin’ in. My pa used to say, ‘Anybody can break down. It takes a man not to.’ We always try to hold in.” She folded the quilt neatly about Grampa’s legs and around his shoulders. She brought the corner of the quilt over his head like a cowl and pulled it down over his face. Sairy handed her half-a-dozen big safety pins, and she pinned the quilt neatly and tightly about the long package. And at last she stood up. “It won’t be a bad burying,” she said. “We got a preacher to see him in, an’ his folks is all aroun’.” Suddenly she swayed a little, and Sairy went to her and steadied her. “It’s sleep —” Ma said in a shamed tone. “No, I’m awright. We been so busy gettin’ ready, you see.”

“Come out in the air,” Sairy said.

“Yeah, I’m all done here.” Sairy blew out the candle and the two went out.

A bright fire burned in the bottom of the little gulch. And Tom, with sticks and wire, had made supports from which two kettles hung and bubbled furiously, and good steam poured out under the lids. Rose of Sharon knelt on the ground out of range of the burning heat, and she had a long spoon in her hand. She saw Ma come out of the tent, and she stood up and went to her.

“Ma,” she said. “I got to ask.”

“Scared again?” Ma asked. “Why, you can’t get through nine months without sorrow.”

“But will it—hurt the baby?”

Ma said, “They used to be a sayin’, ‘A chile born outa sorrow’ll be a happy chile.’ Isn’t that so, Mis’ Wilson?”

“I heard it like that,” said Sairy. “An’ I heard the other: ‘Born outa too much joy’ll be a doleful boy.’”

“I’m all jumpy inside,” said Rose of Sharon.

“Well, we ain’t none of us jumpin’ for fun,” said Ma. “You jes’ keep watchin’ the pots.”

On the edge of the ring of firelight the men had gathered. For tools they had a shovel and a mattock. Pa marked out the ground—eight feet long and three feet wide. The work went on in relays. Pa chopped the earth with the mattock and then Uncle John shoveled it out. Al chopped and Tom shoveled, Noah chopped and Connie shoveled. And the hole drove down, for the work never diminished in speed. The shovels of dirt flew out of the hole in quick spurts. When Tom was shoulder deep in the rectangular pit, he said, “How deep, Pa?”

“Good an’ deep. A couple feet more. You get out now, Tom, and get that paper wrote.”

Tom boosted himself out of the hole and Noah took his place. Tom went to Ma, where she tended the fire. “We got any paper an’ pen, Ma?”

Ma shook her head slowly, “No-o. That’s one thing we didn’ bring.” She looked toward Sairy. And the little woman walked quickly to her tent. She brought back a Bible and a half pencil. “Here,” she said. “They’s a clear page in front. Use that an’ tear it out.” She handed book and pencil to Tom.

Tom sat down in the firelight. He squinted his eyes in concentration, and at last wrote slowly and carefully on the end paper in big clear letters: “This here is William James Joad, dyed of a stroke, old old man. His fokes bured him becaws they got no money to pay for funerls. Nobody kilt him. Jus a stroke an he dyed.” He stopped. “Ma, listen to this here.” He read it slowly to her.

“Why, that soun’s nice,” she said. “Can’t you stick on somepin from Scripture so it’ll be religious? Open up an’ git a-sayin’ somepin

outa Scripture."

"Got to be short," said Tom. "I ain't got much room lef' on the page."

Sairy said, "How 'bout 'God have mercy on his soul'?"

"No," said Tom. "Sounds too much like he was hung. I'll copy somepin." He turned the pages and read, mumbling his lips, saying the words under his breath. "Here's a good short one," he said. "'An' Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord.'"

"Don't mean nothin'," said Ma. "Long's you're gonna put one down, it might's well mean somepin."

Sairy said, "Turn to Psalms, over further. You kin always get somepin outa Psalms."

Tom flipped the pages and looked down the verses. "Now here *is* one," he said. "This here's a nice one, just blowed full a religion: 'Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.' How's that?"

"That's real nice," said Ma. "Put that one in."

Tom wrote it carefully. Ma rinsed and wiped a fruit jar and Tom screwed the lid down tight on it. "Maybe the preacher ought to wrote it," he said.

Ma said, "No, the preacher wan't no kin." She took the jar from him and went into the dark tent. She unpinned the covering and slipped the fruit jar in under the thin cold hands and pinned the comforter tight again. And then she went back to the fire.

The men came from the grave, their faces shining with perspiration. "Awright," said Pa. He and John and Noah and Al went into the tent, and they came out carrying the long, pinned bundle between them. They carried it to the grave. Pa leaped into the hole and received the bundle in his arms and laid it gently down. Uncle John put out a hand and helped Pa out of the hole. Pa asked, "How about Granma?"

"I'll see," Ma said. She walked to the mattress and looked down at the old woman for a moment. Then she went back to the grave. "Sleepin'," she said. "Maybe she'd hold it against me, but I ain't a-gonna wake her up. She's tar'd."

Pa said, "Where at's the preacher? We oughta have a prayer."

Tom said, "I seen him walkin' down the road. He don't like to pray no more."

“Don’t like to pray?”

“No,” said Tom. “He ain’t a preacher no more. He figgers it ain’t right to fool people actin’ like a preacher when he ain’t a preacher. I bet he went away so nobody wouldn’ ast him.”

Casy had come quietly near, and he heard Tom speaking. “I didn’ run away,” he said. “I’ll he’p you folks, but I won’t fool ya.”

Pa said, “Won’t you say a few words? Ain’t none of our folks ever been buried without a few words.”

“I’ll say ’em,” said the preacher.

Connie led Rose of Sharon to the graveside, she reluctant. “You got to,” Connie said. “It ain’t decent not to. It’ll jus’ be a little.”

The firelight fell on the grouped people, showing their faces and their eyes, dwindling on their dark clothes. All the hats were off now. The light danced, jerking over the people.

Casy said, “It’ll be a short one.” He bowed his head, and the others followed his lead. Casy said solemnly, “This here ol’ man jus’ lived a life an’ jus’ died out of it. I don’t know whether he was good or bad, but that don’t matter much. He was alive, an’ that’s what matters. An’ now he’s dead, an’ that don’t matter. Heard a fella tell a poem one time, an’ he says ‘All that lives is holy.’ Got to thinkin’, an’ purty soon it means more than the words says. An’ I wouldn’t pray for a ol’ fella that’s dead. He’s awright. He got a job to do, but it’s all laid out for ’im an’ there’s on’y one way to do it. But us, we got a job to do, an’ they’s a thousan’ ways, an’ we don’ know which one to take. An’ if I was to pray, it’d be for the folks that don’ know which way to turn. Grampa here, he got the easy straight. An’ now cover ’im up and let ’im get to his work.” He raised his head.

Pa said, “Amen,” and the others muttered, “A-men.” Then Pa took the shovel, half filled it with dirt, and spread it gently into the black hole. He handed the shovel to Uncle John, and John dropped in a shovelful. Then the shovel went from hand to hand until every man had his turn. When all had taken their duty and their right, Pa attacked the mound of loose dirt and hurriedly filled the hole. The women moved back to the fire to see to supper. Ruthie and Winfield watched, absorbed.

Ruthie said solemnly, “Grampa’s down under there.” And Winfield looked at her with horrified eyes. And then he ran away to the fire and sat on the ground and sobbed to himself.

Pa half filled the hole, and then he stood panting with the effort while Uncle John finished it. And John was shaping up the mound when Tom stopped him. “Listen,” Tom said. “’F we leave a grave, they’ll have it open in no time. We got to hide it. Level her off an’ we’ll strew dry grass. We got to do that.”

Pa said, “I didn’ think a that. It ain’t right to leave a grave unmounded.”

“Can’t he’p it,” said Tom. “They’d dig ’im right up, an’ we’d get it for breakin’ the law. You know what I get if I break the law.”

“Yeah,” Pa said. “I forgot that.” He took the shovel from John and leveled the grave. “She’ll sink, come winter,” he said.

“Can’t he’p that,” said Tom. “We’ll be a long ways off by winter. Tromp her in good, an’ we’ll strew stuff over her.”

When the pork and potatoes were done the families sat about on the ground and ate, and they were quiet, staring into the fire. Wilson, tearing a slab of meat with his teeth, sighed with contentment. “Nice eatin’ pig,” he said.

“Well,” Pa explained, “we had a couple shoats, an’ we thought we might’s well eat ’em. Can’t get nothin’ for them. When we get kinda use’ ta movin’ an’ Ma can set up bread, why, it’ll be pretty nice, seein’ the country an’ two kags a’ pork right in the truck. How long you folks been on the road?”

Wilson cleared his teeth with his tongue and swallowed. “We ain’t been lucky,” he said. “We been three weeks from home.”

“Why, God Awmighty, we aim to be in California in ten days or less.”

Al broke in, “I dunno, Pa. With that load we’re packin’, we maybe ain’t never gonna get there. Not if they’s mountains to go over.”

They were silent about the fire. Their faces were turned downward and their hair and foreheads showed in the firelight. Above the little dome of the firelight the summer stars shone thinly, and the heat of the day was gradually withdrawing. On her mattress, away from the fire, Granma whimpered softly like a puppy. The heads of all turned in her direction.

Ma said, “Rosasharn, like a good girl go lay down with Granma. She needs somebody now. She’s knowin’, now.”

Rose of Sharon got to her feet and walked to the mattress and lay

beside the old woman, and the murmur of their soft voices drifted to the fire. Rose of Sharon and Granma whispered together on the mattress.

Noah said, “Funny thing is—losin’ Grampa ain’t made me feel no different than I done before. I ain’t no sadder than I was.”

“It’s just the same thing,” Casy said. “Grampa an’ the old place, they was jus’ the same thing.”

Al said, “It’s a goddamn shame. He been talkin’ what he’s gonna do, how he gonna squeeze grapes over his head an’ let the juice run in his whiskers, an’ all stuff like that.”

Casy said, “He was foolin’, all the time. I think he knowed it. An’ Grampa didn’ die tonight. He died the minute you took ’im off the place.”

“You sure a that?” Pa cried.

“Why, no. Oh, he was breathin’,” Casy went on, “but he was dead. He was that place, an’ he knowed it.”

Uncle John said, “Did you know he was a-dyin’?”

“Yeah,” said Casy. “I knowed it.”

John gazed at him, and a horror grew in his face. “An’ you didn’ tell nobody?”

“What good?” Casy asked.

“We—we might of did somepin.”

“What?”

“I don’ know, but——”

“No,” Casy said, “you couldn’ a done nothin’. Your way was fixed an’ Grampa didn’ have no part in it. He didn’ suffer none. Not after fust thing this mornin’. He’s jus’ stayin’ with the lan’. He couldn’ leave it.”

Uncle John sighed deeply.

Wilson said, “We hadda leave my brother Will.” The heads turned toward him. “Him an’ me had forties side by side. He’s older’n me. Neither one ever drove a car. Well, we went in an’ we sol’ ever’thing. Will, he bought a car, an’ they give him a kid to show ’im how to use it. So the afternoon ’fore we’re gonna start, Will an’ Aunt Minnie go a-practicin’. Will, he comes to a bend in the road an’ he yells ‘Whoa’ an’ yanks back, an’ he goes through a fence. An’ he yells ‘Whoa, you bastard’ an’ tromps down on the gas an’ goes

over into a gulch. An' there he was. Didn't have nothin' more to sell an' didn't have no car. But it were his own damn fault, praise God. He's so damn mad he won't come along with us, jus' set there a-cussin' an' a-cussin'."

"What's he gonna do?"

"I dunno. He's too mad to figger. An' we couldn' wait. On'y had eighty-five dollars to go on. We couldn' set an' cut it up, but we et it up anyways. Didn' go a hunderd mile when a tooth in the rear end bust, an' cost thirty dollars to get her fix', an' then we got to get a tire, an' then a spark plug cracked, an' Sairy got sick. Had ta stop ten days. An' now the goddamn car is bust again, an' money's gettin' low. I dunno when we'll ever get to California. 'F I could on'y fix a car, but I don' know nothin' about cars."

Al asked importantly, "What's the matter?"

"Well, she jus' won't run. Starts an' farts an' stops. In a minute she'll start again, an' then 'fore you can git her goin', she peters out again."

"Runs a minute an' then dies?"

"Yes, sir. An' I can't keep her a-goin' no matter how much gas I give her. Got worse an' worse, an' now I cain't get her a-movin' a-tall."

Al was very proud and very mature, then. "I think you got a plugged gas line. I'll blow her out for ya."

And Pa was proud too. "He's a good hand with a car," Pa said.

"Well, I'll sure thank ya for a han'. I sure will. Makes a fella kinda feel—like a little kid, when he can't fix nothin'. When we get to California I aim to get me a nice car. Maybe she won't break down."

Pa said, "When we get there. Gettin' there's the trouble."

"Oh, but she's worth it," said Wilson. "Why, I seen han'bills how they need folks to pick fruit, an' good wages. Why, jus' think how it's gonna be, under them shady trees a-pickin' fruit an' takin' a bite ever' once in a while. Why, hell, they don't care how much you eat 'cause they got so much. An' with them good wages, maybe a fella can get hisself a little piece a land an' work out for extra cash. Why, hell, in a couple years I bet a fella could have a place of his own."

Pa said, "We seen them han'bills. I got one right here." He took out his purse and from it took a folded orange handbill. In black type it said, "Pea Pickers Wanted in California. Good Wages All

Season. 800 Pickers Wanted."

Wilson looked at it curiously. "Why, that's the one I seen. The very same one. You s'pose—maybe they got all eight hunderd awready?"

Pa said, "This is jus' one little part a California. Why, that's the secon' biggest State we got. S'pose they did get all them eight hunderd. They's plenty places else. I rather pick fruit anyways. Like you says, under them trees an' pickin' fruit—why, even the kids'd like to do that."

Suddenly Al got up and walked to the Wilsons' touring car. He looked in for a moment and then came back and sat down.

"You can't fix her tonight," Wilson said.

"I know. I'll get to her in the morning."

Tom had watched his young brother carefully. "I was thinkin' somepin like that myself," he said.

Noah asked, "What you two fellas talkin' about?"

Tom and Al were silent, each waiting for the other. "You tell 'em," Al said finally.

"Well, maybe it's no good, an' maybe it ain't the same thing Al's thinking. Here she is, anyways. We got a overload, but Mr. an' Mis' Wilson ain't. If some of us folks could ride with them an' take some a their light stuff in the truck, we wouldn't break no springs an' we could git up hills. An' me an' Al both knows about a car, so we could keep that car a-rollin'. We'd keep together on the road an' it'd be good for ever'body."

Wilson jumped up. "Why, sure. Why, we'd be proud. We certain'y would. You hear that, Sairy?"

"It's a nice thing," said Sairy. "Wouldn' be a burden on you folks?"

"No, by God," said Pa. "Wouldn't be no burden at all. You'd be helpin' us."

Wilson settled back uneasily. "Well, I dunno."

"What's a matter, don' you wanta?"

"Well, ya see—I on'y got 'bout thirty dollars lef', an' I won't be no burden."

Ma said, "You won't be no burden. Each'll help each, an' we'll all git to California. Sairy Wilson he'ped lay Grampa out," and she

stopped. The relationship was plain.

Al cried, “That car’ll take six easy. Say me to drive, an’ Rosasharn an’ Connie and Granma. Then we take the big light stuff an’ pile her on the truck. An’ we’ll trade off ever’ so often.” He spoke loudly, for a load of worry was lifted from him.

They smiled shyly and looked down at the ground. Pa fingered the dusty earth with his fingertips. He said, “Ma favors a white house with oranges growin’ around. They’s a big pitcher on a calendar she seen.”

Sairy said, “If I get sick again, you got to go on an’ get there. We ain’t a-goin’ to burden.”

Ma looked carefully at Sairy, and she seemed to see for the first time the pain-tormented eyes and the face that was haunted and shrinking with pain. And Ma said, “We gonna see you get through. You said yourself, you can’t let help go unwanted.”

Sairy studied her wrinkled hands in the firelight. “We got to get some sleep tonight.” She stood up.

“Grampa—it’s like he’s dead a year,” Ma said.

The families moved lazily to their sleep, yawning luxuriously. Ma sloshed the tin plates off a little and rubbed the grease free with a flour sack. The fire died down and the stars descended. Few passenger cars went by on the highway now, but the transport trucks thundered by at intervals and put little earthquakes in the ground. In the ditch the cars were hardly visible under the starlight. A tied dog howled at the service station down the road. The families were quiet and sleeping, and the field mice grew bold and scampered about among the mattresses. Only Sairy Wilson was awake. She stared into the sky and braced her body firmly against pain.

Chapter 14

The western land, nervous under the beginning change. The Western States, nervous as horses before a thunder storm. The great owners, nervous, sensing a change, knowing nothing of the nature of the change. The great owners, striking at the immediate thing, the widening government, the growing labor unity; striking at new taxes, at plans; not knowing these things are results, not causes. Results, not causes; results, not causes. The causes lie deep and simply—the causes are a hunger in a stomach, multiplied a million times; a hunger in a single soul, hunger for joy and some security, multiplied a million times; muscles and mind aching to grow, to work, to create, multiplied a million times. The last clear definite function of man—muscles aching to work, minds aching to create beyond the single need—this is man. To build a wall, to build a house, a dam, and in the wall and house and dam to put something of Manself, and to Manself take back something of the wall, the house, the dam; to take hard muscles from the lifting, to take the clear lines and form from conceiving. For man, unlike any other thing organic or inorganic in the universe, grows beyond his work, walks up the stairs of his concepts, emerges ahead of his accomplishments. This you may say of man—when theories change and crash, when schools, philosophies, when narrow dark alleys of thought, national, religious, economic, grow and disintegrate, man reaches, stumbles forward, painfully, mistakenly sometimes. Having stepped forward, he may slip back, but only half a step, never the full step back. This you may say and know it and know it. This you may know when the bombs plummet out of the black planes on the market place, when prisoners are stuck like pigs, when the crushed bodies drain filthily in the dust. You may know it in this way. If the step were not being taken, if the stumbling-forward ache were not alive, the bombs would not fall, the throats would not be cut. Fear the time when the bombs stop falling while the bombers live—for every bomb is proof that the spirit has not died. And fear the time when the strikes stop while the great owners live—for every little beaten strike is proof that the step is being taken. And this you can know—fear the time when Manself will not suffer and die for a concept, for this one quality is the foundation of Manself, and this one quality is man, distinctive in the universe.

The Western States nervous under the beginning change. Texas and Oklahoma, Kansas and Arkansas, New Mexico, Arizona, California. A single family moved from the land. Pa borrowed money from the bank, and now the bank wants the land. The land company—that's the bank when it has land—wants tractors, not families on the land. Is a tractor bad? Is the power that turns the long furrows wrong? If this tractor were ours it would be good—not mine, but ours. If our tractor turned the long furrows of our land, it would be good. Not my land, but ours. We could love that tractor then as we have loved this land when it was ours. But this tractor does two things—it turns the land and turns us off the land. There is little difference between this tractor and a tank. The people are driven, intimidated, hurt by both. We must think about this.

One man, one family driven from the land; this rusty car creaking along the highway to the west. I lost my land, a single tractor took my land. I am alone and I am bewildered. And in the night one family camps in a ditch and another family pulls in and the tents come out. The two men squat on their hams and the women and children listen. Here is the node, you who hate change and fear revolution. Keep these two squatting men apart; make them hate, fear, suspect each other. Here is the anlage of the thing you fear. This is the zygote. For here "I lost my land" is changed; a cell is split and from its splitting grows the thing you hate—"We lost *our* land." The danger is here, for two men are not as lonely and perplexed as one. And from this first "we" there grows a still more dangerous thing: "I have a little food" plus "I have none." If from this problem the sum is "We have a little food," the thing is on its way, the movement has direction. Only a little multiplication now, and this land, this tractor are ours. The two men squatting in a ditch, the little fire, the sidemeat stewing in a single pot, the silent, stone-eyed women; behind, the children listening with their souls to words their minds do not understand. The night draws down. The baby has a cold. Here, take this blanket. It's wool. It was my mother's blanket—take it for the baby. This is the thing to bomb. This is the beginning—from "I" to "we."

If you who own the things people must have could understand this, you might preserve yourself. If you could separate causes from results, if you could know that Paine, Marx, Jefferson, Lenin, were results, not causes, you might survive. But that you cannot know. For the quality of owning freezes you forever into "I," and cuts you

off forever from the “we.”

The Western States are nervous under the beginning change. Need is the stimulus to concept, concept to action. A half-million people moving over the country; a million more restive, ready to move; ten million more feeling the first nervousness.

And tractors turning the multiple furrows in the vacant land.

Chapter 15

Along 66 the hamburger stands—Al & Susy's Place—Carl's Lunch—Joe & Minnie—Will's Eats. Board-and-bat shacks. Two gasoline pumps in front, a screen door, a long bar, stools, and a foot rail. Near the door three slot machines, showing through glass the wealth in nickels three bars will bring. And beside them, the nickel phonograph with records piled up like pies, ready to swing out to the turntable and play dance music, "Ti-pi-ti-pi-tin," "Thanks for the Memory," Bing Crosby, Benny Goodman. At one end of the counter a covered case; candy cough drops, caffeine sulphate called Sleepless, No-Doze; candy, cigarettes, razor blades, aspirin, Bromo-Seltzer, Alka-Seltzer. The walls decorated with posters, bathing girls, blondes with big breasts and slender hips and waxen faces, in white bathing suits, and holding a bottle of Coca-Cola and smiling—see what you get with a Coca-Cola. Long bar, and salts, peppers, mustard pots, and paper napkins. Beer taps behind the counter, and in back the coffee urns, shiny and steaming, with glass gauges showing the coffee level. And pies in wire cages and oranges in pyramids of four. And little piles of Post Toasties, corn flakes, stacked up in designs.

The signs on cards, picked out with shining mica: Pies Like Mother Used to Make. Credit Makes Enemies, Let's Be Friends. Ladies May Smoke But Be Careful Where You Lay Your Butts. Eat Here and Keep Your Wife for a Pet. IITYWYBAD?

Down at one end the cooking plates, pots of stew, potatoes, pot roast, roast beef, gray roast pork waiting to be sliced.

Minnie or Susy or Mae, middle-aging behind the counter, hair curled and rouge and powder on a sweating face. Taking orders in a soft low voice, calling them to the cook with a screech like a peacock. Mopping the counter with circular strokes, polishing the big shining coffee urns. The cook is Joe or Carl or Al, hot in a white coat and apron, beady sweat on white forehead, below the white cook's cap; moody, rarely speaking, looking up for a moment at each new entry. Wiping the griddle, slapping down the hamburger. He repeats Mae's orders gently, scrapes the griddle, wipes it down with burlap. Moody and silent.

Mae is the contact, smiling, irritated, near to outbreak; smiling

while her eyes look on past—unless for truck drivers. There's the backbone of the joint. Where the trucks stop, that's where the customers come. Can't fool truck drivers, they know. They bring the custom. They know. Give 'em a stale cup a coffee an' they're off the joint. Treat 'em right an' they come back. Mae really smiles with all her might at truck drivers. She bridles a little, fixes her back hair so that her breasts will lift with her raised arms, passes the time of day and indicates great things, great times, great jokes. Al never speaks. He is no contact. Sometimes he smiles a little at a joke, but he never laughs. Sometimes he looks up at the vivaciousness in Mae's voice, and then he scrapes the griddle with a spatula, scrapes the grease into an iron trough around the plate. He presses down a hissing hamburger with his spatula. He lays the split buns on the plate to toast and heat. He gathers up stray onions from the plate and heaps them on the meat and presses them in with the spatula. He puts half the bun on top of the meat, paints the other half with melted butter, with thin pickle relish. Holding the bun on the meat, he slips the spatula under the thin pad of meat, flips it over, lays the buttered half on top, and drops the hamburger on a small plate. Quarter of a dill pickle, two black olives beside the sandwich. Al skims the plate down the counter like a quoit. And he scrapes his griddle with the spatula and looks moodily at the stew kettle.

Cars whisking by on 66. License plates. Mass., Tenn., RI, NY, Vt., Ohio. Going west. Fine cars, cruising at sixty-five.

There goes one of them Cords. Looks like a coffin on wheels.

But, Jesus, how they travel!

See that La Salle? Me for that. I ain't a hog. I go for a La Salle.

'F ya goin' big, what's a matter with a Cad'? Jus' a little bigger, little faster.

I'd take a Zephyr myself. You ain't ridin' no fortune, but you got class an' speed. Give me a Zephyr.

Well, sir, you may get a laugh outa this—I'll take a Buick-Puick. That's good enough.

But, hell, that costs in the Zephyr class an' it ain't got the sap.

I don' care. I don' want nothin' to do with nothing of Henry Ford's. I don' like 'im. Never did. Got a brother worked in the plant. Oughta hear him tell.

Well, a Zephyr got sap.

The big cars on the highway. Languid, heat-raddled ladies, small nucleuses about whom revolve a thousand accouterments: creams, ointments to grease themselves, coloring matter in phials—black, pink, red, white, green, silver—to change the color of hair, eyes, lips, nails, brows, lashes, lids. Oils, seeds, and pills to make the bowels move. A bag of bottles, syringes, pills, powders, fluids, jellies to make their sexual intercourse safe, odorless, and unproductive. And this apart from clothes. What a hell of a nuisance!

Lines of weariness around the eyes, lines of discontent down from the mouth, breasts lying heavily in little hammocks, stomach and thighs straining against cases of rubber. And the mouths panting, the eyes sullen, disliking sun and wind and earth, resenting food and weariness, hating time that rarely makes them beautiful and always makes them old.

Beside them, little pot-bellied men in light suits and panama hats; clean, pink men with puzzled, worried eyes, with restless eyes. Worried because formulas do not work out; hungry for security and yet sensing its disappearance from the earth. In their lapels the insignia of lodges and service clubs, places where they can go and, by a weight of numbers of little worried men, reassure themselves that business is noble and not the curious ritualized thievery they know it is; that business men are intelligent in spite of the records of their stupidity; that they are kind and charitable in spite of the principles of sound business; that their lives are rich instead of the thin tiresome routines they know; and that a time is coming when they will not be afraid any more.

And these two, going to California; going to sit in the lobby of the Beverly-Wilshire Hotel and watch people they envy go by, to look at mountains—mountains, mind you, and great trees—he with his worried eyes and she thinking how the sun will dry her skin. Going to look at the Pacific Ocean, and I'll bet a hundred thousand dollars to nothing at all, he will say, "It isn't as big as I thought it would be." And she will envy plump young bodies on the beach. Going to California really to go home again. To say, "So-and-So was at the table next to us at the Trocadero. She's really a mess, but she does wear nice clothes." And he, "I talked to good sound business men out there. They don't see a chance till we get rid of that fellow in the White House." And, "I got it from a man in the know—she has

syphilis, you know. She was in that Warner picture. Man said she'd slept her way into pictures. Well, she got what she was looking for." But the worried eyes are never calm, and the pouting mouth is never glad. The big car cruising along at sixty.

I want a cold drink.

Well, there's something up ahead. Want to stop?

Do you think it would be clean?

Clean as you're going to find in this God-forsaken country.

Well, maybe the bottled soda will be all right.

The great car squeals and pulls to a stop. The fat worried man helps his wife out.

Mae looks at and past them as they enter. Al looks up from his griddle, and down again. Mae knows. They'll drink a five-cent soda and crab that it ain't cold enough. The woman will use six paper napkins and drop them on the floor. The man will choke and try to put the blame on Mae. The woman will sniff as though she smelled rotting meat and they will go out again and tell forever afterward that the people in the West are sullen. And Mae, when she is alone with Al, has a name for them. She calls them shitheels.

Truck drivers. That's the stuff.

Here's a big transport comin'. Hope they stop; take away the taste of them shitheels. When I worked in that hotel in Albuquerque, Al, the way they steal—ever' darn thing. An' the bigger the car they got, the more they steal—towels, silver, soap dishes. I can't figger it.

And Al, morosely, Where ya think they get them big cars and stuff ? Born with 'em? You won't never have nothin'.

The transport truck, a driver and relief. How 'bout stoppin' for a cup a Java? I know this dump.

How's the schedule?

Oh, we're ahead!

Pull up, then. They's a ol' war horse in here that's a kick. Good Java, too.

The truck pulls up. Two men in khaki riding trousers, boots, short jackets, and shiny-visored military caps. Screen door—slam.

H'ya, Mae?

Well, if it ain't Big Bill the Rat! When'd you get back on this run?

Week ago.

The other man puts a nickel in the phonograph, watches the disk slip free and the turntable rise up under it. Bing Crosby's voice—golden. "Thanks for the memory, of sunburn at the shore—You might have been a headache, but you never were a bore —" And the truck driver sings for Mae's ears, you might have been a haddock but you never was a whore—

Mae laughs. Who's ya frien', Bill? New on this run, ain't he?

The other puts a nickel in the slot machine, wins four slugs, and puts them back. Walks to the counter.

Well, what's it gonna be?

Oh, cup a Java. Kinda pie ya got?

Banana cream, pineapple cream, chocolate cream—an' apple.

Make it apple. Wait—Kind is that big thick one?

Mae lifts it out and sniffs it. Banana cream.

Cut off a hunk; make it a big hunk.

Man at the slot machine says, Two all around.

Two it is. Seen any new etchin's lately, Bill?

Well, here's one.

Now, you be careful front of a lady.

Oh, this ain't bad. Little kid comes in late ta school. Teacher says, "Why ya late?" Kid says, "Had a take a heifer down—get 'er bred." Teacher says, "Couldn't your ol' man do it?" Kid says, "Sure he could, but not as good as the bull."

Mae squeaks with laughter, harsh screeching laughter. Al, slicing onions carefully on a board, looks up and smiles, and then looks down again. Truck drivers, that's the stuff. Gonna leave a quarter each for Mae. Fifteen cents for pie an' coffee an' a dime for Mae. An' they ain't tryin' to make her, neither.

Sitting together on the stools, spoons sticking up out of the coffee mugs. Passing the time of day. And Al, rubbing down his griddle, listening but making no comment. Bing Crosby's voice stops. The turntable drops down and the record swings into its place in the pile. The purple light goes off. The nickel, which has caused all this mechanism to work, has caused Crosby to sing and an orchestra to play—this nickel drops from between the contact points into the box where the profits go. This nickel, unlike most money, has actually done a job of work, has been physically responsible for a

reaction.

Steam spurts from the valve of the coffee urn. The compressor of the ice machine chugs softly for a time and then stops. The electric fan in the corner waves its head slowly back and forth, sweeping the room with a warm breeze. On the highway, on 66, the cars whiz by.

They was a Massachusetts car stopped a while ago, said Mae.

Big Bill grasped his cup around the top so that the spoon stuck up between his first and second fingers. He drew in a snort of air with the coffee, to cool it. “You ought to be out on 66. Cars from all over the country. All headin’ west. Never seen so many before. Sure some honeys on the road.”

“We seen a wreck this mornin’,” his companion said. “Big car. Big Cad’, a special job and a honey, low, cream-color, special job. Hit a truck. Folded the radiator right back into the driver. Must a been doin’ ninety. Steerin’ wheel went right on through the guy an’ lef’ him a-wigglin’ like a frog on a hook. Peach of a car. A honey. You can have her for peanuts now. Drivin’ alone, the guy was.”

Al looked up from his work. “Hurt the truck?”

“Oh, Jesus Christ! Wasn’t a truck. One of them cut-down cars full a stoves an’ pans an’ mattresses an’ kids an’ chickens. Goin’ west, you know. This guy come by us doin’ ninety—r’ared up on two wheels just to pass us, an’ a car’s comin’ so he cuts in an’ whangs this here truck. Drove like he’s blin’ drunk. Jesus, the air was full a bed clothes an’ chickens an’ kids. Killed one kid. Never seen such a mess. We pulled up. Ol’ man that’s drivin’ the truck, he jus’ stan’s there lookin’ at that dead kid. Can’t get a word out of ’im. Jus’ rum-dumb. God Almighty, the road is full a them families goin’ west. Never seen so many. Gets worse all a time. Wonder where the hell they all come from?”

“Wonder where they all go to,” said Mae. “Come here for gas sometimes, but they don’t hardly never buy nothin’ else. People says they steal. We ain’t got nothin’ layin’ around. They never stole nothin’ from us.”

Big Bill, munching his pie, looked up the road through the screened window. “Better tie your stuff down. I think you got some of ’em comin’ now.”

A 1926 Nash sedan pulled wearily off the highway. The back seat

was piled nearly to the ceiling with sacks, with pots and pans, and on the very top, right up against the ceiling, two boys rode. On the top of the car, a mattress and a folded tent; tent poles tied along the running board. The car pulled up to the gas pumps. A dark-haired, hatchet-faced man got slowly out. And the two boys slid down from the load and hit the ground.

Mae walked around the counter and stood in the door. The man was dressed in gray wool trousers and a blue shirt, dark blue with sweat on the back and under the arms. The boys in overalls and nothing else, ragged patched overalls. Their hair was light, and it stood up evenly all over their heads, for it had been roached. Their faces were streaked with dust. They went directly to the mud puddle under the hose and dug their toes into the mud.

The man asked, “Can we git some water, ma’am?”

A look of annoyance crossed Mae’s face. “Sure, go ahead.” She said softly over her shoulder, “I’ll keep my eye on the hose.” She watched while the man slowly unscrewed the radiator cap and ran the hose in.

A woman in the car, a flaxen-haired woman, said, “See if you can’t git it here.”

The man turned off the hose and screwed on the cap again. The little boys took the hose from him and they upended it and drank thirstily. The man took off his dark, stained hat and stood with a curious humility in front of the screen. “Could you see your way to sell us a loaf of bread, ma’am?”

Mae said, “This ain’t a grocery store. We got bread to make san’widges.”

“I know, ma’am.” His humility was insistent. “We need bread and there ain’t nothin’ for quite a piece, they say.”

“’F we sell bread we gonna run out.” Mae’s tone was faltering.

“We’re hungry,” the man said.

“Whyn’t you buy a san’widge? We got nice san’widges, hamburgs.”

“We’d sure admire to do that, ma’am. But we can’t. We got to make a dime do all of us.” And he said embarrassedly, “We ain’t got but a little.”

Mae said, “You can’t get no loaf a bread for a dime. We only got fifteen-cent loafs.”

From behind her Al growled, “God Almighty, Mae, give ’em bread.”

“We’ll run out ’fore the bread truck comes.”

“Run out, then, goddamn it,” said Al. And he looked sullenly down at the potato salad he was mixing.

Mae shrugged her plump shoulders and looked to the truck drivers to show them what she was up against.

She held the screen door open and the man came in, bringing a smell of sweat with him. The boys edged in behind him and they went immediately to the candy case and stared in—not with craving or with hope or even with desire, but just with a kind of wonder that such things could be. They were alike in size and their faces were alike. One scratched his dusty ankle with the toe nails of his other foot. The other whispered some soft message and then they straightened their arms so that their clenched fists in the overall pockets showed through the thin blue cloth.

Mae opened a drawer and took out a long waxpaper-wrapped loaf. “This here is a fifteen-cent loaf.”

The man put his hat back on his head. He answered with inflexible humility, “Won’t you—can’t you see your way to cut off ten cents’ worth?”

Al said snarlingly, “Goddamn it, Mae. Give ’em the loaf.”

The man turned toward Al. “No, we want ta buy ten cents’ worth of it. We got it figgered awful close, mister, to get to California.”

Mae said resignedly, “You can have this for ten cents.”

“That’d be robbin’ you, ma’am.”

“Go ahead—Al says to take it.” She pushed the wax-papered loaf across the counter. The man took a deep leather pouch from his rear pocket, untied the strings, and spread it open. It was heavy with silver and with greasy bills.

“May soun’ funny to be so tight,” he apologized. “We got a thousan’ miles to go, an’ we don’ know if we’ll make it.” He dug in the pouch with a forefinger, located a dime, and pinched in for it. When he put it down on the counter he had a penny with it. He was about to drop the penny back into the pouch when his eye fell on the boys frozen before the candy counter. He moved slowly down to them. He pointed in the case at big long sticks of striped peppermint. “Is them penny candy, ma’am?”

Mae moved down and looked in. “Which ones?”

“There, them stripy ones.”

The little boys raised their eyes to her face and they stopped breathing; their mouths were partly opened, their half-naked bodies were rigid.

“Oh—them. Well, no—them’s two for a penny.”

“Well, gimme two then, ma’am.” He placed the copper cent carefully on the counter. The boys expelled their held breath softly. Mae held the big sticks out.

“Take ’em,” said the man.

They reached timidly, each took a stick, and they held them down at their sides and did not look at them. But they looked at each other, and their mouth corners smiled rigidly with embarrassment.

“Thank you, ma’am.” The man picked up the bread and went out the door, and the little boys marched stiffly behind him, the red-striped sticks held tightly against their legs. They leaped like chipmunks over the front seat and onto the top of the load, and they burrowed back out of sight like chipmunks.

The man got in and started his car, and with a roaring motor and a cloud of blue oily smoke the ancient Nash climbed up on the highway and went on its way to the west.

From inside the restaurant the truck drivers and Mae and Al stared after them.

Big Bill wheeled back. “Them wasn’t two-for-a-cent candy,” he said.

“What’s that to you?” Mae said fiercely.

“Them was nickel apiece candy,” said Bill.

“We got to get goin’,” said the other man. “We’re droppin’ time.” They reached in their pockets. Bill put a coin on the counter and the other man looked at it and reached again and put down a coin. They swung around and walked to the door.

“So long,” said Bill.

Mae called, “Hey! Wait a minute. You got change.”

“You go to hell,” said Bill, and the screen door slammed.

Mae watched them get into the great truck, watched it lumber off in low gear, and heard the shift up the whining gears to cruising

ratio. “Al —” she said softly.

He looked up from the hamburger he was patting thin and stacking between waxed papers. “What ya want?”

“Look there.” She pointed at the coins beside the cups—two half-dollars. Al walked near and looked, and then he went back to his work.

“Truck drivers,” Mae said reverently, “an’ after them shitheels.”

Flies struck the screen with little bumps and droned away. The compressor chugged for a time and then stopped. On 66 the traffic whizzed by, trucks and fine streamlined cars and jalopies; and they went by with a vicious whiz. Mae took down the plates and scraped the pie crusts into a bucket. She found her damp cloth and wiped the counter with circular sweeps. And her eyes were on the highway, where life whizzed by.

Al wiped his hands on his apron. He looked at a paper pinned to the wall over the griddle. Three lines of marks in columns on the paper. Al counted the longest line. He walked along the counter to the cash register, rang “No Sale,” and took out a handful of nickels.

“What ya doin’?” Mae asked.

“Number three’s ready to pay off,” said Al. He went to the third slot machine and played his nickels in, and on the fifth spin of the wheels the three bars came up and the jack pot dumped out into the cup. Al gathered up the big handful of coins and went back of the counter. He dropped them in the drawer and slammed the cash register. Then he went back to his place and crossed out the line of dots. “Number three gets more play’n the others,” he said. “Maybe I ought to shift ’em around.” He lifted a lid and stirred the slowly simmering stew.

“I wonder what they’ll do in California?” said Mae.

“Who?”

“Them folks that was just in.”

“Christ knows,” said Al.

“S’pose they’ll get work?”

“How the hell would I know?” said Al.

She stared eastward along the highway. “Here comes a transport, double. Wonder if they stop? Hope they do.” And as the huge truck came heavily down from the highway and parked, Mae seized her cloth and wiped the whole length of the counter. And she took a

few swipes at the gleaming coffee urn too, and turned up the bottle-gas under the urn. Al brought out a handful of little turnips and started to peel them. Mae's face was gay when the door opened and the two uniformed truck drivers entered.

"Hi, sister!"

"I won't be a sister to no man," said Mae. They laughed and Mae laughed. "What'll it be, boys?"

"Oh, a cup a Java. What kinda pie ya got?"

"Pineapple cream an' banana cream an' chocolate cream an' apple."

"Give me apple. No, wait—what's that big thick one?"

Mae picked up the pie and smelled it. "Pineapple cream," she said.

"Well, chop out a hunk a that."

The cars whizzed viciously by on 66.

Chapter 16

Joads and Wilsons crawled westward as a unit: El Reno and Bridgeport, Clinton, Elk City, Sayre, and Texola. There's the border, and Oklahoma was behind. And this day the cars crawled on and on, through the Panhandle of Texas. Shamrock and Alanreed, Groom and Yarnell. Then went through Amarillo in the evening, drove too long, and camped when it was dusk. They were tired and dusty and hot. Granma had convulsions from the heat, and she was weak when they stopped.

That night Al stole a fence rail and made a ridge pole on the truck, braced at both ends. That night they ate nothing but pan biscuits, cold and hard, held over from breakfast. They flopped down on the mattresses and slept in their clothes. The Wilsons didn't even put up their tent.

Joads and Wilsons were in flight across the Panhandle, the rolling gray country, lined and cut with old flood scars. They were in flight out of Oklahoma and across Texas. The land turtles crawled through the dust and the sun whipped the earth, and in the evening the heat went out of the sky and the earth sent up a wave of heat from itself.

Two days the families were in flight, but on the third the land was too huge for them and they settled into a new technique of living; the highway became their home and movement their medium of expression. Little by little they settled into the new life. Ruthie and Winfield first, then Al, then Connie and Rose of Sharon, and, last, the older ones. The land rolled like great stationary ground swells. Wildorado and Vega and Boise and Glenrio. That's the end of Texas. New Mexico and the mountains. In the far distance, waved up against the sky, the mountains stood. And the wheels of the cars creaked around, and the engines were hot, and the steam spurted around the radiator caps. They crawled to the Pecos river, and crossed at Santa Rosa. And they went on for twenty miles.

Al Joad drove the touring car, and his mother sat beside him, and Rose of Sharon beside her. Ahead the truck crawled. The hot air folded in waves over the land, and the mountains shivered in the

heat. Al drove listlessly, hunched back in the seat, his hand hooked easily over the cross-bar of the steering wheel; his gray hat, peaked and pulled to an incredibly cocky shape, was low over one eye; and as he drove, he turned and spat out the side now and then.

Ma, beside him, had folded her hands in her lap, had retired into a resistance against weariness. She sat loosely, letting the movement of the car sway her body and her head. She squinted her eyes ahead at the mountains. Rose of Sharon was braced against the movement of the car, her feet pushed tight against the floor, and her right elbow hooked over the door. And her plump face was tight against the movement, and her head jiggled sharply because her neck muscles were tight. She tried to arch her whole body as a rigid container to preserve her fetus from shock. She turned her head toward her mother.

"Ma," she said. Ma's eyes lighted up and she drew her attention toward Rose of Sharon. Her eyes went over the tight, tired, plump face, and she smiled. "Ma," the girl said, "when we get there, all you gonna pick fruit an' kinda live in the country, ain't you?"

Ma smiled a little satirically. "We ain't there yet," she said. "We don't know what it's like. We got to see."

"Me an' Connie don't want to live in the country no more," the girl said. "We got it all planned up what we gonna do."

For a moment a little worry came on Ma's face. "Ain't you gonna stay with us—with the family?" she asked.

"Well, we talked all about it, me an' Connie. Ma, we wanna live in a town." She went on excitedly, "Connie gonna get a job in a store or maybe a fact'ry. An' he's gonna study at home, maybe radio, so he can git to be a expert an' maybe later have his own store. An' we'll go to pitchers whenever. An' Connie says I'm gonna have a *doctor* when the baby's born; an' he says we'll see how times is, an' maybe I'll go to a hospiddle. An' we'll have a car, little car. An' after he studies at night, why—it'll be nice, an' he tore a page outa *Western Love Stories*, an' he's gonna send off for a course, 'cause it don't cost nothin' to send off. Says right on that clipping. I seen it. An', why—they even get you a job when you take that course—radios, it is—nice clean work, and a future. An' we'll live in town an' go to pitchers whenever, an'—well, I'm gonna have a 'lectric iron, an' the baby'll have all new stuff. Connie says all new stuff—white an'—Well, you seen in the catalogue all the stuff they got for

a baby. Maybe right at first while Connie's studyin' at home it won't be so easy, but—well, when the baby comes, maybe he'll be all done studyin' an' we'll have a place, little bit of a place. We don't want nothin' fancy, but we want it nice for the baby —" Her face glowed with excitement. "An' I thought—well, I thought maybe we could all go in town, an' when Connie gets his store—maybe Al could work for him."

Ma's eyes had never left the flushing face. Ma watched the structure grow and followed it. "We don' want you to go 'way from us," she said. "It ain't good for folks to break up."

Al snorted, "Me work for Connie? How about Connie comes a-workin' for me? He thinks he's the on'y son-of-a-bitch can study at night?"

Ma suddenly seemed to know it was all a dream. She turned her head forward again and her body relaxed, but the little smile stayed around her eyes. "I wonder how Granma feels today," she said.

Al grew tense over the wheel. A little rattle had developed in the engine. He speeded up and the rattle increased. He retarded his spark and listened, and then he speeded up for a moment and listened. The rattle increased to a metallic pounding. Al blew his horn and pulled the car to the side of the road. Ahead the truck pulled up and then backed slowly. Three cars raced by, westward, and each one blew its horn and the last driver leaned out and yelled, "Where the hell ya think you're stoppin'?"

Tom backed the truck close, and then he got out and walked to the touring car. From the back of the loaded truck heads looked down. Al retarded his spark and listened to his idling motor. Tom asked, "What's a matter, Al?"

Al speeded the motor. "Listen to her." The rattling pound was louder now.

Tom listened. "Put up your spark an' idle," he said. He opened the hood and put his head inside. "Now speed her." He listened for a moment and then closed the hood. "Well, I guess you're right, Al," he said.

"Con-rod bearing, ain't it?"

"Sounds like it," said Tom.

"I kep' plenty oil in," Al complained.

"Well, it jus' didn' get to her. Drier'n a bitch monkey now. Well,

there ain't nothin' to do but tear her out. Look, I'll pull ahead an' find a flat place to stop. You come ahead slow. Don't knock the pan out of her."

Wilson asked, "Is it bad?"

"Purty bad," said Tom, and walked back to the truck and moved slowly ahead.

Al explained, "I don' know what made her go out. I give her plenty of oil." Al knew the blame was on him. He felt his failure.

Ma said, "It ain't your fault. You done ever'thing right." And then she asked a little timidly, "Is it terrible bad?"

"Well, it's hard to get at, an' we got to get a new con-rod or else some babbitt in this one." He sighed deeply. "I sure am glad Tom's here. I never fitted no bearing. Hope to Jesus Tom did."

A huge red billboard stood beside the road ahead, and it threw a great oblong shadow. Tom edged the truck off the road and across the shallow roadside ditch, and he pulled up in the shadow. He got out and waited until Al came up.

"Now go easy," he called. "Take her slow or you'll break a spring too."

Al's face went red with anger. He throttled down his motor. "Goddamn it," he yelled, "I didn't burn that bearin' out! What d'ya mean, I'll bust a spring too?"

Tom grinned. "Keep all four feet on the groun'," he said. "I didn' mean nothin'. Jus' take her easy over this ditch."

Al grumbled as he inched the touring car down, and up the other side. "Don't you go givin' nobody no idear I burned out that bearin'." The engine clattered loudly now. Al pulled into the shade and shut down the motor.

Tom lifted the hood and braced it. "Can't even start on her before she cools off," he said. The family piled down from the cars and clustered about the touring car.

Pa asked, "How bad?" And he squatted on his hams.

Tom turned to Al. "Ever fitted one?"

"No," said Al, "I never. 'Course I had pans off."

Tom said, "Well, we got to tear the pan off an' get the rod out, an' we got to get a new part an' hone her an' shim her an' fit her. Good day's job. Got to go back to that las' place for a part, Santa Rosa.

Albuquerque's about seventy-five miles on—Oh, Jesus, tomorra's Sunday! We can't get nothin' tomorra." The family stood silently. Ruthie crept close and peered into the open hood, hoping to see the broken part. Tom went on softly, "Tomorra's Sunday. Monday we'll get the thing an' prob'ly won't get her fitted 'fore Tuesday. We ain't got the tools to make it easy. Gonna be a job." The shadow of a buzzard slid across the earth, and the family all looked up at the sailing black bird.

Pa said, "What I'm scairt of is we'll run outa money so we can't git there 't all. Here's all us eatin', an' got to buy gas an' oil. 'F we run outa money, I don' know what we gonna do."

Wilson said, "Seems like it's my fault. This here goddamn wreck's give me trouble right along. You folks been nice to us. Now you jus' pack up an' get along. Me an' Sairy'll stay, an' we'll figger some way. We don't aim to put you folks out none."

Pa said slowly, "We ain't a-gonna do it. We got almost a kin bond. Grampa, he died in your tent."

Sairy said tiredly, "We been nothin' but trouble, nothin' but trouble."

Tom slowly made a cigarette, and inspected it and lighted it. He took off his ruined cap and wiped his forehead. "I got an idear," he said. "Maybe nobody gonna like it, but here she is: The nearer to California our folks get, the quicker they's gonna be money rollin' in. Now this here car'll go twicet as fast as that truck. Now here's my idea. You take out some a that stuff in the truck, an' then all you folks but me an' the preacher get in an' move on. Me an' Casy'll stop here an' fix this here car an' then we drive on, day an' night, an' we'll catch up, or if we don't meet on the road, you'll be a-workin' anyways. An' if you break down, why, jus' camp 'longside the road till we come. You can't be no worse off, an' if you get through, why, you'll be a-workin', an' stuff'll be easy. Casy can give me a lif' with this here car, an' we'll come a-sailin'."

The gathered family considered it. Uncle John dropped to his hams beside Pa.

Al said, "Won't ya need me to give ya a han' with that con-rod?"

"You said your own se'f you never fixed one."

"That's right," Al agreed. "All ya got to have is a strong back. Maybe the preacher don' wanta stay."

“Well—whoever—I don’ care,” said Tom.

Pa scratched the dry earth with his forefinger. “I kind a got a notion Tom’s right,” he said. “It ain’t goin’ ta do no good all of us stayin’ here. We can get fifty, a hunderd miles on ’fore dark.”

Ma said worriedly, “How you gonna find us?”

“We’ll be on the same road,” said Tom. “Sixty-six right on through. Come to a place name’ Bakersfiel’. Seen it on the map I got. You go straight on there.”

“Yeah, but when we get to California an’ spread out sideways off this road—?”

“Don’t you worry,” Tom reassured her. “We’re gonna find ya. California ain’t the whole world.”

“Looks like an awful big place on the map,” said Ma.

Pa appealed for advice. “John, you see any reason why not?”

“No,” said John.

“Mr. Wilson, it’s your car. You got any objections if my boy fixes her an’ brings her on?”

“I don’ see none,” said Wilson. “Seems like you folks done ever’thing for us awready. Don’ see why I cain’t give your boy a han’.”

“You can be workin’, layin’ in a little money, if we don’ ketch up with ya,” said Tom. “An’ suppose we all jus’ lay aroun’ here. There ain’t no water here, an’ we can’t move this here car. But s’pose you all git out there an’ git to work. Why, you’d have money, an’ maybe a house to live in. How about it, Casy? Wanna stay with me an’ gimme a lif’?”

“I wanna do what’s bes’ for you folks,” said Casy. “You took me in, carried me along. I’ll do whatever.”

“Well, you’ll lay on your back an’ get grease in your face if you stay here,” Tom said.

“Suits me awright.”

Pa said, “Well, if that’s the way she’s gonna go, we better get a-shovin’. We can maybe squeeze in a hunderd miles ’fore we stop.”

Ma stepped in front of him. “I ain’t a-gonna go.”

“What you mean, you ain’t gonna go? You got to go. You got to look after the family.” Pa was amazed at the revolt.

Ma stepped to the touring car and reached in on the floor of the

back seat. She brought out a jack handle and balanced it in her hand easily. “I ain’t a-gonna go,” she said.

“I tell you, you got to go. We made up our mind.”

And now Ma’s mouth set hard. She said softly, “On’y way you gonna get me to go is whup me.” She moved the jack handle gently again. “An’ I’ll shame you, Pa. I won’t take no whuppin’, cryin’ an’ a-beggin’. I’ll light into you. An’ you ain’t so sure you can whup me anyways. An’ if ya do get me, I swear to God I’ll wait till you got your back turned, or you’re settin’ down, an’ I’ll knock you belly-up with a bucket. I swear to Holy Jesus’ sake I will.”

Pa looked helplessly about the group. “She sassy,” he said. “I never seen her so sassy.” Ruthie giggled shrilly.

The jack handle flicked hungrily back and forth in Ma’s hand. “Come on,” said Ma. “You made up your mind. Come on an’ whup me. Jus’ try it. But I ain’t a-goin’; or if I do, you ain’t never gonna get no sleep, ’cause I’ll wait an’ I’ll wait, an’ jus’ the minute you take sleep in your eyes, I’ll slap ya with a stick a stove wood.”

“So goddamn sassy,” Pa murmured. “An’ she ain’t young, neither.”

The whole group watched the revolt. They watched Pa, waiting for him to break into fury. They watched his lax hands to see the fists form. And Pa’s anger did not rise, and his hands hung limply at his sides. And in a moment the group knew that Ma had won. And Ma knew it too.

Tom said, “Ma, what’s eatin’ on you? What ya wanna do this-a-way for? What’s the matter’th you anyways? You gone johnrabbit on us?”

Ma’s face softened, but her eyes were still fierce. “You done this ’thout thinkin’ much,” Ma said. “What we got lef’ in the worl’? Nothin’ but us. Nothin’ but the folks. We come out an’ Grampa, he reached for the shovel-shelf right off. An’ now, right off, you wanna bust up the folks——”

Tom cried, “Ma, we was gonna catch up with ya. We wasn’t gonna be gone long.”

Ma waved the jack handle. “S’pose we was camped, and you went on by. S’pose we got on through, how’d we know where to leave the word, an’ how’d you know where to ask?” She said, “We got a bitter road. Granma’s sick. She’s up there on the truck a-pawin’ for

a shovel herself. She's jus' tar'd out. We got a long bitter road ahead."

Uncle John said, "But we could be makin' some money. We could have a little bit saved up, come time the other folks got there."

The eyes of the whole family shifted back to Ma. She was the power. She had taken control. "The money we'd make wouldn't do no good," she said. "All we got is the family unbroke. Like a bunch a cows, when the lobos are ranging, stick all together. I ain't scared while we're all here, all that's alive, but I ain't gonna see us bust up. The Wilsons here is with us, an' the preacher is with us. I can't say nothin' if they want to go, but I'm a-goin' cat-wild with this here piece a bar-arn if my own folks busts up." Her tone was cold and final.

Tom said soothingly, "Ma, we can't all camp here. Ain't no water here. Ain't even much shade here. Granma, she needs shade."

"All right," said Ma. "We'll go along. We'll stop first place they's water an' shade. An'—the truck'll come back an' take you in town to get your part, an' it'll bring you back. You ain't goin' walkin' along in the sun, an' I ain't havin' you out all alone, so if you get picked up there ain't nobody of your folks to he'p ya."

Tom drew his lips over his teeth and then snapped them open. He spread his hands helplessly and let them flop against his sides. "Pa," he said, "if you was to rush her one side an' me the other an' then the res' pile on, an' Granma jump down on top, maybe we can get Ma 'thout more'n two-three of us gets killed with that there jack handle. But if you ain't willin' to get your head smashed, I guess Ma's went an'filled her flush. Jesus Christ, one person with their mind made up can shove a lot of folks aroun'! You win, Ma. Put away that jack handle 'fore you hurt somebody."

Ma looked in astonishment at the bar of iron. Her hand trembled. She dropped her weapon on the ground, and Tom, with elaborate care, picked it up and put it back in the car. He said, "Pa, you jus' got set back on your heels. Al, you drive the folks on an' get 'em camped, an' then you bring the truck back here. Me an' the preacher'll get the pan off. Then, if we can make it, we'll run in Santa Rosa an' try an' get a con-rod. Maybe we can, seein' it's Sat'dy night. Get jumpin' now so we can go. Lemme have the monkey wrench an' pliers outa the truck." He reached under the car and felt the greasy pan. "Oh, yeah, lemme have a can, that ol' bucket, to

catch the oil. Got to save that." Al handed over the bucket and Tom set it under the car and loosened the oil cap with a pair of pliers. The black oil flowed down his arm while he unscrewed the cap with his fingers, and then the black stream ran silently into the bucket. Al had loaded the family on the truck by the time the bucket was half full. Tom, his face already smudged with oil, looked out between the wheels. "Get back fast!" he called. And he was loosening the pan bolts as the truck moved gently across the shallow ditch and crawled away. Tom turned each bolt a single turn, loosening them evenly to spare the gasket.

The preacher knelt beside the wheels. "What can I do?"

"Nothin', not right now. Soon's the oil's out an' I get these here bolts loose, you can he'p me drop the pan off." He squirmed away under the car, loosening the bolts with a wrench and turning them out with his fingers. He left the bolts on each end loosely threaded to keep the pan from dropping. "Ground's still hot under here," Tom said. And then, "Say, Casy, you been awful goddamn quiet the las' few days. Why, Jesus! When I first come up with you, you was makin' a speech ever' half-hour or so. An' here you ain't said ten words the las' couple days. What's a matter—gettin' sour?"

Casy was stretched out on his stomach, looking under the car. His chin, bristly with sparse whiskers, rested on the back of one hand. His hat was pushed back so that it covered the back of his neck. "I done enough talkin' when I was a preacher to las' the rest a my life," he said.

"Yeah, but you done some talkin' sence, too."

"I'm all worried up," Casy said. "I didn' even know it when I was a-preachin' aroun', but I was doin' consid'able tom-cattin' aroun'. If I ain't gonna preach no more, I got to get married. Why, Tommy, I'm a-lustin' after the flesh."

"Me too," said Tom. "Say, the day I come outa McAlester I was smokin'. I run me down a girl, a hoor girl, like she was a rabbit. I won't tell ya what happened. I wouldn' tell nobody what happened."

Casy laughed. "I know what happened. I went a-fastin' into the wilderness one time, an' when I come out the same damn thing happened to me."

"Hell it did!" said Tom. "Well, I saved my money anyway, an' I give that girl a run. Thought I was nuts. I should a paid her, but I

on'y got five bucks to my name. She said she didn' want no money. Here, roll in under here an' grab a-holt. I'll tap her loose. Then you turn out that bolt an' I turn out my end, an' we let her down easy. Careful that gasket. See, she comes off in one piece. They's on'y four cylinders to these here ol' Dodges. I took one down one time. Got main bearings big as a cantaloupe. Now—let her down—hold it. Reach up an' pull down that gasket where it's stuck—easy now. There!" The greasy pan lay on the ground between them, and a little oil still lay in the wells. Tom reached into one of the front wells and picked out some broken pieces of babbitt. "There she is," he said. He turned the babbitt in his fingers. "Shaft's up. Look in back an' get the crank. Turn her over till I tell you."

Casy got to his feet and found the crank and fitted it. "Ready?"

"Reach—now easy—little more—little more—right there."

Casy kneeled down and looked under again. Tom rattled the connecting-rod bearing against the shaft. "There she is."

"What ya s'pose done it?" Casy asked.

"Oh, hell, I don' know! This buggy been on the road thirteen years. Says sixty-thousand miles on the speedometer. That means a hunderd an' sixty, an' God knows how many times they turned the numbers back. Gets hot—maybe somebody let the oil get low—jus' went out." He pulled the cotter-pins and put his wrench on a bearing bolt. He strained and the wrench slipped. A long gash appeared on the back of his hand. Tom looked at it—the blood flowed evenly from the wound and met the oil and dripped into the pan.

"That's too bad," Casy said. "Want I should do that an' you wrap up your han'?"

"Hell, no! I never fixed no car in my life 'thout cuttin' myself. Now it's done I don't have to worry no more." He fitted the wrench again. "Wisht I had a crescent wrench," he said, and he hammered the wrench with the butt of his hand until the bolts loosened. He took them out and laid them with the pan bolts in the pan, and the cotter-pins with them. He loosened the bearing bolts and pulled out the piston. He put piston and connecting-rod in the pan. "There, by God!" He squirmed free from under the car and pulled the pan out with him. He wiped his hand on a piece of gunny sacking and inspected the cut. "Bleedin' like a son-of-a-bitch," he said. "Well, I can stop that." He urinated on the ground, picked up a handful of

the resulting mud, and plastered it over the wound. Only for a moment did the blood ooze out, and then it stopped. “Bes’ damn thing in the worl’ to stop bleedin’,” he said.

“Han’ful a spider web’ll do it too,” said Casy.

“I know, but there ain’t no spider web, an’ you can always get piss.” Tom sat on the running board and inspected the broken bearing. “Now if we can on’y find a ’25 Dodge an’ get a used con-rod an’ some shims, maybe we’ll make her all right. Al must a gone a hell of a long ways.”

The shadow of the billboard was sixty feet out by now. The afternoon lengthened away. Casy sat down on the running board and looked westward. “We gonna be in high mountains pretty soon,” he said, and he was silent for a few moments. Then, “Tom!”

“Yeah?”

“Tom, I been watchin’ the cars on the road, them we passed an’ them that passed us. I been keepin’ track.”

“Track a what?”

“Tom, they’s hunderds a families like us all a-goin’ west. I watched. There ain’t none of ’em goin’ east—hunderds of ’em. Did you notice that?”

“Yeah, I noticed.”

“Why—it’s like—it’s like they was runnin’ away from soldiers. It’s like a whole country is movin’.”

“Yeah,” Tom said. “They is a whole country movin’. We’re movin’ too.”

“Well—s’pose all these here folks an’ ever’body—s’pose they can’t get no jobs out there?”

“Goddamn it!” Tom cried. “How’d I know? I’m jus’ puttin’ one foot in front a the other. I done it at Mac for four years, jus’ marchin’ in cell an’ out cell an’ in mess an’ out mess. Jesus Christ, I thought it’d be somepin different when I come out! Couldn’t think a nothin’ in there, else you go stir happy, an’ now can’t think a nothin’.” He turned on Casy. “This here bearing went out. We didn’ know it was goin’, so we didn’ worry none. Now she’s out an’ we’ll fix her. An’ by Christ that goes for the rest of it! I ain’t gonna worry. I can’t do it. This here little piece of iron an’ babbitt. See it? Ya see it? Well, that’s the only goddamn thing in the world I got on my mind. I wonder where the hell Al is.”

Casy said, “Now look, Tom. Oh, what the hell! So goddamn hard to say anything.”

Tom lifted the mud pack from his hand and threw it on the ground. The edge of the wound was lined with dirt. He glanced over to the preacher. “You’re fixin’ to make a speech,” Tom said. “Well, go ahead. I like speeches. Warden used to make speeches all the time. Didn’t do us no harm an’ he got a hell of a bang out of it. What you tryin’ to roll out?”

Casy picked the backs of his long knotty fingers. “They’s stuff goin’ on and they’s folks doin’ things. Them people layin’ one foot down in front of the other, like you says, they ain’t thinkin’ where they’re goin’, like you says—but they’re all layin’ ’em down the same direction, jus’ the same. An’ if ya listen, you’ll hear a movin’, an’ a sneakin’, an’ a rustlin’, an’—an’ a res’lessness. They’s stuff goin’ on that the folks doin’ it don’t know nothin’ about—yet. They’s gonna come somepin outa all these folks goin’ wes’—outa all their farms lef’ lonely. They’s gonna come a thing that’s gonna change the whole country.”

Tom said, “I’m still layin’ my dogs down one at a time.”

“Yeah, but when a fence comes up at ya, ya gonna climb that fence.”

“I climb fences when I got fences to climb,” said Tom.

Casy sighed. “It’s the bes’ way. I gotta agree. But they’s different kinda fences. They’s folks like me that climbs fences that ain’t even strang up yet—an’ can’t he’p it.”

“Ain’t that Al a-comin’?” Tom asked.

“Yeah. Looks like.”

Tom stood up and wrapped the connecting-rod and both halves of the bearing in the piece of sack. “Wanta make sure I get the same,” he said.

The truck pulled alongside the road and Al leaned out the window.

Tom said, “You was a hell of a long time. How far’d you go?”

Al sighed. “Got the rod out?”

“Yeah.” Tom held up the sack. “Babbitt jus’ broke down.”

“Well, it wasn’t no fault of mine,” said Al.

“No. Where’d you take the folks?”

“We had a mess,” Al said. “Granma got to bellerin’, an’ that set Rosasharn off an’ she bellered some. Got her head under a mattress an’ bellered. But Granma, she was just layin’ back her jaw an’ bayin’ like a moonlight houn’ dog. Seems like Granma ain’t got no sense no more. Like a little baby. Don’ speak to nobody, don’ seem to reco’nize nobody. Jus’ talks on like she’s talkin’ to Grampa.”

“Where’d ya leave ’em?” Tom insisted.

“Well, we come to a camp. Got shade an’ got water in pipes. Costs half a dollar a day to stay there. But ever’body’s so goddamn tired an’ wore out an’ mis’able, they stayed there. Ma says they got to ’cause Granma’s so tired an’ wore out. Got Wilson’s tent up an’ got our tarp for a tent. I think Granma gone nuts.”

Tom looked toward the lowering sun. “Casy,” he said, “somebody got to stay with this car or she’ll get stripped. You jus’ as soon?”

“Sure. I’ll stay.”

Al took a paper bag from the seat. “This here’s some bread an’ meat Ma sent, an’ I got a jug a water here.”

“She don’t forget nobody,” said Casy.

Tom got in beside Al. “Look,” he said. “We’ll get back jus’ as soon’s we can. But we can’t tell how long.”

“I’ll be here.”

“Awright. Don’t make no speeches to yourself. Get goin’, Al.” The truck moved off in the late afternoon. “He’s a nice fella,” Tom said. “He thinks about stuff all the time.”

“Well, hell—if you been a preacher, I guess you got to. Pa’s all mad about it costs fifty cents jus’ to camp under a tree. He can’t see that noways. Settin’ a-cussin’. Says nex’ thing they’ll sell ya a little tank a air. But Ma says they gotta be near shade an’ water ’cause a Granma.” The truck rattled along the highway, and now that it was unloaded, every part of it rattled and clashed. The side-board of the bed, the cut body. It rode hard and light. Al put it up to thirty-eight miles an hour and the engine clattered heavily and a blue smoke of burning oil drifted up through the floor boards.

“Cut her down some,” Tom said. “You gonna burn her right down to the hub caps. What’s eatin’ on Granma?”

“I don’t know. ’Member the las’ couple days she’s been airy-nary, sayin’ nothin’ to nobody? Well, she’s yellin’ an’ talkin’ plenty now, on’y she’s talkin’ to Grampa. Yellin’ at him. Kinda scary, too. You

can almos' see 'im a-settin' there grinnin' at her the way he always done, a-fingerin' hisself an' grinnin'. Seems like she sees him a-settin' there, too. She's jus' givin' him hell. Say, Pa, he give me twenty dollars to hand you. He don' know how much you gonna need. Ever see Ma stand up to 'im like she done today?"

"Not I remember. I sure did pick a nice time to get paroled. I figgered I was gonna lay aroun' an' get up late an' eat a lot when I come home. I was goin' out an' dance, an' I was gonna go tom-cattin'—an' here I ain't had time to do none of them things."

Al said, "I forgot. Ma give me a lot a stuff to tell you. She says don't drink nothin', an' don' get in no arguments, an' don't fight nobody. 'Cause she says she's scairt you'll get sent back."

"She got plenty to get worked up about 'thout me givin' her no trouble," said Tom.

"Well, we could get a couple beers, can't we? I'm jus' a-ravin' for a beer."

"I dunno," said Tom. "Pa'd crap a litter of lizards if we buy beers."

"Well, look, Tom. I got six dollars. You an' me could get a couple pints an' go down the line. Nobody don't know I got that six bucks. Christ, we could have a hell of a time for ourselves."

"Keep ya jack," Tom said. "When we get out to the coast you an' me'll take her an' we'll raise hell. Maybe when we're workin'—" He turned in the seat. "I didn' think you was a fella to go down the line. I figgered you was talkin' 'em out of it."

"Well, hell, I don't know nobody here. If I'm gonna ride aroun' much, I'm gonna get married. I'm gonna have me a hell of a time when we get to California."

"Hope so," said Tom.

"You ain't sure a nothin' no more."

"No, I ain't sure a nothin'."

"When ya killed that fella—did—did ya ever dream about it or anything? Did it worry ya?"

"No."

"Well, didn' ya never think about it?"

"Sure. I was sorry 'cause he was dead."

"Ya didn't take no blame to yourself ?"

“No. I done my time, an’ I done my own time.”

“Was it—awful bad—there?”

Tom said nervously, “Look, Al. I done my time, an’ now it’s done. I don’ wanna do it over an’ over. There’s the river up ahead, an’ there’s the town. Let’s jus’ try an’ get a con-rod an’ the hell with the res’ of it.”

“Ma’s awful partial to you,” said Al. “She mourned when you was gone. Done it all to herself. Kinda cryin’ down inside of her throat. We could tell what she was thinkin’ about, though.”

Tom pulled his cap down low over his eyes. “Now look here, Al. S’pose we talk ’bout some other stuff.”

“I was jus’ tellin’ ya what Ma done.”

“I know—I know. But—I ruther not. I ruther jus’—lay one foot down in front a the other.”

Al relapsed into an insulted silence. “I was jus’ tryin’ to tell ya,” he said, after a moment.

Tom looked at him, and Al kept his eyes straight ahead. The lightened truck bounced noisily along. Tom’s long lips drew up from his teeth and he laughed softly. “I know you was, Al. Maybe I’m kinda stir-nuts. I’ll tell ya about it sometime maybe. Ya see, it’s jus’ somepin you wanta know. Kinda interestin’. But I got a kind a funny idear the bes’ thing’d be if I forget about it for a while. Maybe in a little while it won’t be that way. Right now when I think about it my guts gets all droopy an’ nasty feelin’. Look here, Al, I’ll tell ya one thing—the jail house is jus’ a kind a way a drivin’ a guy slowly nuts. See? An’ they go nuts, an’ you see ’em an’ hear ’em, an’ pretty soon you don’ know if you’re nuts or not. When they get to screamin’ in the night sometimes you think it’s you doin’ the screamin’—an’ sometimes it is.”

Al said, “Oh! I won’t talk about it no more, Tom.”

“Thirty days is all right,” Tom said. “An’ a hunderd an’ eighty days is all right. But over a year—I dunno. There’s somepin about it that ain’t like nothin’ else in the worl’. Somepin screwy about it, somepin screwy about the whole idea a lockin’ people up. Oh, the hell with it! I don’ wanna talk about it. Look a the sun a-flashin’ on them windas.”

The truck drove to the service-station belt, and there on the right-hand side of the road was a wrecking yard—an acre lot surrounded

by a high barbed-wire fence, a corrugated iron shed in front with used tires piled up by the doors, and price-marked. Behind the shed there was a little shack built of scrap, scrap lumber and pieces of tin. The windows were windshields built into the walls. In the grassy lot the wrecks lay, cars with twisted, stove-in noses, wounded cars lying on their sides with the wheels gone. Engines rusting on the ground and against the shed. A great pile of junk; fenders and truck sides, wheels and axles; over the whole lot a spirit of decay, of mold and rust; twisted iron, half-gutted engines, a mass of derelicts.

Al drove the truck up on the oily ground in front of the shed. Tom got out and looked into the dark doorway. “Don’t see nobody,” he said, and he called, “Anybody here?”

“Jesus, I hope they got a ’25 Dodge.”

Behind the shed a door banged. A specter of a man came through the dark shed. Thin, dirty, oily skin tight against stringy muscles. One eye was gone, and the raw, uncovered socket squirmed with eye muscles when his good eye moved. His jeans and shirt were thick and shiny with old grease, and his hands cracked and lined and cut. His heavy, pouting underlip hung out sullenly.

Tom asked, “You the boss?”

The one eye glared. “I work for the boss,” he said sullenly. “Whatcha want?”

“Got a wrecked ’ 25 Dodge? We need a con-rod.”

“I don’t know. If the boss was here he could tell ya—but he ain’t here. He’s went home.”

“Can we look an’ see?”

The man blew his nose into the palm of his hand and wiped his hand on his trousers. “You from hereabouts?”

“Come from east—goin’ west.”

“Look aroun’ then. Burn the goddamn place down, for all I care.”

“Looks like you don’t love your boss none.”

The man shambled close, his one eye flaring. “I hate ’im,” he said softly. “I hate the son-of-a-bitch! Gone home now. Gone home to his house.” The words fell stumbling out. “He got a way—he got a way a-pickin’ a fella an’ a-tearin’ a fella. He—the son-of-a-bitch. Got a girl nineteen, purty. Says to me, ‘How’d ya like ta marry her?’ Says that right to me. An’ tonight—says, ‘They’s a dance; how’d ya like

to go?' Me, he says it to me!" Tears formed in his eyes and tears dripped from the corner of the red eye socket. "Some day, by God—some day I'm gonna have a pipe wrench in my pocket. When he says them things he looks at my eye. An' I'm gonna, I'm gonna jus' take his head right down off his neck with that wrench, little piece at a time." He panted with his fury. "Little piece at a time, right down off'n his neck."

The sun disappeared behind the mountains. Al looked into the lot at the wrecked cars. "Over there, look, Tom! That there looks like a '25 or '26."

Tom turned to the one-eyed man. "Mind if we look?"

"Hell, no! Take any goddamn thing you want."

They walked, threading their way among the dead automobiles, to a rusting sedan, resting on flat tires.

"Sure it's a '25," Al cried. "Can we yank off the pan, mister?"

Tom kneeled down and looked under the car. "Pan's off awready. One rod's been took. Looks like one gone." He wriggled under the car. "Get a crank an' turn her over, Al." He worked the rod against the shaft. "Purty much froze with grease." Al turned the crank slowly. "Easy," Tom called. He picked a splinter of wood from the ground and scraped the cake of grease from the bearing and the bearing bolts.

"How is she for tight?" Al asked.

"Well, she's a little loose, but not bad."

"Well, how is she for wore?"

"Got plenty shim. Ain't been all took up. Yeah, she's O.K. Turn her over easy now. Get her down, easy—there! Run over the truck an' get some tools."

The one-eyed man said, "I'll get you a box a tools." He shuffled off among the rusty cars and in a moment he came back with a tin box of tools. Tom dug out a socket wrench and handed it to Al.

"You take her off. Don' lose no shims an' don' let the bolts get away, an' keep track a the cotter-pins. Hurry up. The light's gettin' dim."

Al crawled under the car. "We oughta get us a set a socket wrenches," he called. "Can't get in no place with a monkey wrench."

"Yell out if you want a hand," Tom said.

The one-eyed man stood helplessly by. “I’ll help ya if ya want,” he said. “Know what that son-of-a-bitch done? He come by an’ he got on white pants. An’ he says, ‘Come on, le’s go out to my yacht.’ By God, I’ll whang him some day!” He breathed heavily. “I ain’t been out with a woman sence I los’ my eye. An’ he says stuff like that.” And big tears cut channels in the dirt beside his nose.

Tom said impatiently, “Whyn’t you roll on? Got no guards to keep ya here.”

“Yeah, that’s easy to say. Ain’t so easy to get a job—not for a one-eye’ man.”

Tom turned on him. “Now look-a-here, fella. You got that eye wide open. An’ ya dirty, ya stink. Ya jus’ askin’ for it. Ya like it. Lets ya feel sorry for yaself. ’Course ya can’t get no woman with that empty eye flappin’ aroun’. Put somepin over it an’ wash ya face. You ain’t hittin’ nobody with no pipe wrench.”

“I tell ya, a one-eye’ fella got a hard row,” the man said. “Can’t see stuff the way other fellas can. Can’t see how far off a thing is. Ever’thing’s jus’ flat.”

Tom said, “Ya full a crap. Why, I knowed a one-legged whore one time. Think she was takin’ two-bits in a alley? No, by God! She’s gettin’ half a dollar extra. She says, ‘How many one-legged women you slep’ with? None!’ she says. ‘O.K.,’ she says. ‘You got somepin pretty special here, an’ it’s gonna cos’ ya half a buck extry.’ An’ by God, she was gettin’ ’em, too, an’ the fellas comin’ out thinkin’ they’re pretty lucky. She says she’s good luck. An’ I knowed a hump-back in—in a place I was. Make his whole livin’ lettin’ folks rub his hump for luck. Jesus Christ, an’ all you got is one eye gone.”

The man said stumblingly, “Well, Jesus, ya see somebody edge away from ya, an’ it gets into ya.”

“Cover it up then, goddamn it. Ya stickin’ it out like a cow’s ass. Ya like to feel sorry for yaself. There ain’t nothin’ the matter with you. Buy yaself some white pants. Ya gettin’ drunk an’ cryin’ in ya bed, I bet. Need any help, Al?”

“No,” said Al. “I got this here bearin’ loose. Jus’ tryin’ to work the piston down.”

“Don’ bang yaself,” said Tom.

The one-eyed man said softly, “Think—somebody’d like—me?”

“Why, sure,” said Tom. “Tell ’em ya dong’s growed sence you los’

your eye."

"Where at you fellas goin'?"

"California. Whole family. Gonna get work out there."

"Well, ya think a fella like me could get work? Black patch on my eye?"

"Why not? You ain't no cripple."

"Well—could I catch a ride with you fellas?"

"Christ, no. We're so goddamn full now we can't move. You get out some other way. Fix up one a these here wrecks an' go out by yaself."

"Maybe I will, by God," said the one-eyed man.

There was a clash of metal. "I got her," Al called.

"Well, bring her out, let's look at her." Al handed him the piston and connecting-rod and the lower half of the bearing.

Tom wiped the babbitt surface and sighted along it sideways. "Looks O.K. to me," he said. "Say, by God, if we had a light we could get this here in tonight."

"Say, Tom," Al said, "I been thinkin'. We got no ring clamps. Gonna be a job gettin' them rings in, specially underneath."

Tom said, "Ya know, a fella tol' me one time ya wrap some fine brass wire aroun' the ring to hol' her."

"Yeah, but how ya gonna get the wire off?"

"Ya don't get her off. She melts off an' don't hurt nothin'."

"Copper wire'd be better."

"It ain't strong enough," said Tom. He turned to the one-eyed man. "Got any fine brass wire?"

"I dunno. I think they's a spool somewheres. Where d'ya think a fella could get one a them patches one-eye' fellas wear?"

"I don' know," said Tom. "Le's see if you can fin' that wire."

In the iron shed they dug through boxes until they found the spool. Tom set the rod in a vise and carefully wrapped the wire around the piston rings, forcing them deep into their slots, and where the wire was twisted he hammered it flat; and then he turned the piston and tapped the wire all around until it cleared the piston wall. He ran his finger up and down to make sure that the rings and wire were flush with the wall. It was getting dark in the shed. The one-eyed man brought a flashlight and shone its beam on the work.

“There she is!” said Tom. “Say—what’ll ya take for that light?”

“Well, it ain’t much good. Got fifteen cents’ a new batteries. You can have her for—oh, thirty-five cents.”

“O.K. An’ what we owe ya for this here con-rod an’ piston?”

The one-eyed man rubbed his forehead with a knuckle, and a line of dirt peeled off. “Well, sir, I jus’ dunno. If the boss was here, he’d go to a parts book an’ he’d find out how much is a new one, an’ while you was workin’, he’d be findin’ out how bad you’re hung up, an’ how much jack ya got, an’ then he’d—well, say it’s eight bucks in the part book—he’d make a price a five bucks. An’ if you put up a squawk, you’d get it for three. You say it’s all me, but, by God, he’s a son-of-a-bitch. Figgers how bad ya need it. I seen him git more for a ring gear than he give for the whole car.”

“Yeah! But how much am I gonna give you for this here?”

“’Bout a buck, I guess.”

“Awright, an’ I’ll give ya a quarter for this here socket wrench. Make it twice as easy.” He handed over the silver. “Thank ya. An’ cover up that goddamn eye.”

Tom and Al got into the truck. It was deep dark. Al started the motor and turned on the lights. “So long,” Tom called. “See ya maybe in California.” They turned across the highway and started back.

The one-eyed man watched them go, and then he went through the iron shed to his shack behind. It was dark inside. He felt his way to the mattress on the floor, and he stretched out and cried in his bed, and the cars whizzing by on the highway only strengthened the walls of his loneliness.

Tom said, “If you’d tol’ me we’d get this here thing an’ get her in tonight, I’d said you was nuts.”

“We’ll get her in awright,” said Al. “You got to do her, though. I’d be scared I’d get her too tight an’ she’d burn out, or too loose an’ she’d hammer out.”

“I’ll stick her in,” said Tom. “If she goes out again, she goes out. I got nothin’ to lose.”

Al peered into the dusk. The lights made no impression on the gloom; but ahead, the eyes of a hunting cat flashed green in reflection of the lights. “You sure give that fella hell,” Al said. “Sure did tell him where to lay down his dogs.”

“Well, goddamn it, he was askin’ for it! Jus’ a pattin’ his-self ’cause he got one eye, puttin’ all the blame on his eye. He’s a lazy, dirty son-of-a-bitch. Maybe he can snap out of it if he knowed people was wise to him.”

Al said, “Tom, it wasn’t nothin’ I done burned out that bearin’.”

Tom was silent for a moment, then, “I’m gonna take a fall outa you, Al. You jus’ scrabblin’ ass over tit, fear somebody gonna pin some blame on you. I know what’s a matter. Young fella, all full a piss an’ vinegar. Wanta be a hell of a guy all the time. But, goddamn it, Al, don’ keep ya guard up when nobody ain’t sparrin’ with ya. You gonna be all right.”

Al did not answer him. He looked straight ahead. The truck rattled and banged over the road. A cat whipped out from the side of the road and Al swerved to hit it, but the wheels missed and the cat leaped into the grass.

“Nearly got him,” said Al. “Say, Tom. You heard Connie talkin’ how he’s gonna study nights? I been thinkin’ maybe I’d study nights too. You know, radio or television or Diesel engines. Fella might get started that-a-way.”

“Might,” said Tom. “Find out how much they gonna sock ya for the lessons, first. An’figger out if you’re gonna study ’em. There was fellas takin’ them mail lessons in McAlester. I never knowed one of ’em that finished up. Got sick of it an’ left ’em slide.”

“God Awmighty, we forgot to get somepin to eat.”

“Well, Ma sent down plenty; preacher couldn’ eat it all. Be some lef’. I wonder how long it’ll take us to get to California.”

“Christ, I don’ know. Jus’ plug away at her.”

They fell into silence, and the dark came and the stars were sharp and white.

Casy got out of the back seat of the Dodge and strolled to the side of the road when the truck pulled up. “I never expected you so soon,” he said.

Tom gathered the parts in the piece of sacking on the floor. “We was lucky,” he said. “Got a flashlight, too. Gonna fix her right up.”

“You forgot to take your dinner,” said Casy.

“I’ll get it when I finish. Here, Al, pull off the road a little more an’ come hol’ the light for me.” He went directly to the Dodge and

crawled under on his back. Al crawled under on his belly and directed the beam of the flashlight. “Not in my eyes. There, put her up.” Tom worked the piston up into the cylinder, twisting and turning. The brass wire caught a little on the cylinder wall. With a quick push he forced it past the rings. “Lucky she’s loose or the compression’d stop her. I think she’s gonna work all right.”

“Hope that wire don’t clog the rings,” said Al.

“Well, that’s why I hammered her flat. She won’t roll off. I think she’ll jus’ melt out an’ maybe give the walls a brass plate.”

“Think she might score the walls?”

Tom laughed. “Jesus Christ, them walls can take it. She’s drinkin’ oil like a gopher hole awready. Little more ain’t gonna hurt none.” He worked the rod down over the shaft and tested the lower half. “She’ll take some shim.” He said, “Casy!”

“Yeah.”

“I’m takin’ up this here bearing now. Get out to that crank an’ turn her over slow when I tell ya.” He tightened the bolts. “Now. Over slow!” And as the angular shaft turned, he worked the bearing against it. “Too much shim,” Tom said. “Hold it, Casy.” He took out the bolts and removed thin shims from each side and put the bolts back. “Try her again, Casy!” And he worked the rod again. “She’s a lit-tle bit loose yet. Wonder if she’d be too tight if I took out more shim. I’ll try her.” Again he removed the bolts and took out another pair of the thin strips. “Now try her, Casy.”

“That looks good,” said Al.

Tom called, “She any harder to turn, Casy?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“Well, I think she’s snug here. I hope to God she is. Can’t hone no babbitt without tools. This here socket wrench makes her a hell of a lot easier.”

Al said, “Boss a that yard gonna be purty mad when he looks for that size socket an’ she ain’t there.”

“That’s his screwin’,” said Tom. “We didn’ steal her.” He tapped the cotter-pins in and bent the ends out. “I think that’s good. Look, Casy, you hold the light while me an’ Al get this here pan up.”

Casy knelt down and took the flashlight. He kept the beam on the working hands as they patted the gasket gently in place and lined the holes with the pan bolts. The two men strained at the weight of

the pan, caught the end bolts, and then set in the others; and when they were all engaged, Tom took them up little by little until the pan settled evenly in against the gasket, and he tightened hard against the nuts.

"I guess that's her," Tom said. He tightened the oil tap, looked carefully up at the pan, and took the light and searched the ground. "There she is. Le's get the oil back in her."

They crawled out and poured the bucket of oil back in the crank case. Tom inspected the gasket for leaks.

"O.K., Al. Turn her over," he said. Al got into the car and stepped on the starter. The motor caught with a roar. Blue smoke poured from the exhaust pipe. "Throttle down!" Tom shouted. "She'll burn oil till that wire goes. Gettin' thinner now." And as the motor turned over, he listened carefully. "Put up the spark an' let her idle." He listened again. "O.K., Al. Turn her off. I think we done her. Where's that meat now?"

"You make a darn good mechanic," Al said.

"Why not? I worked in the shop a year. We'll take her good an' slow for a couple hunderd miles. Give her a chance to work in."

They wiped their grease-covered hands on bunches of weeds and finally rubbed them on their trousers. They fell hungrily on the boiled pork and swigged the water from the bottle.

"I like to starved," said Al. "What we gonna do now, go on to the camp?"

"I dunno," said Tom. "Maybe they'd charge us a extry half-buck. Le's go on an' talk to the folks—tell 'em we're fixed. Then if they wanta sock us extry—we'll move on. The folks'll wanta know. Jesus, I'm glad Ma stopped us this afternoon. Look around with the light, Al. See we don't leave nothin'. Get that socket wrench in. We may need her again."

Al searched the ground with the flashlight. "Don't see nothin'."

"All right. I'll drive her. You bring the truck, Al." Tom started the engine. The preacher got in the car. Tom moved slowly, keeping the engine at a low speed, and Al followed in the truck. He crossed the shallow ditch, crawling in low gear. Tom said, "These here Dodges can pull a house in low gear. She's sure ratio'd down. Good thing for us—I wanta break that bearin' in easy."

On the highway the Dodge moved along slowly. The 12-volt

headlights threw a short blob of yellowish light on the pavement.

Casy turned to Tom. “Funny how you fellas can fix a car. Jus’ light right in an’ fix her. I couldn’t fix no car, not even now when I seen you do it.”

“Got to grow into her when you’re a little kid,” Tom said. “It ain’t jus’ knowin’. It’s more’n that. Kids now can tear down a car ’thout even thinkin’ about it.”

A jackrabbit got caught in the lights and he bounced along ahead, cruising easily, his great ears flopping with every jump. Now and then he tried to break off the road, but the wall of darkness thrust him back. Far ahead bright headlights appeared and bore down on them. The rabbit hesitated, faltered, then turned and bolted toward the lesser lights of the Dodge. There was a small soft jolt as he went under the wheels. The oncoming car swished by.

“We sure squashed him,” said Casy.

Tom said, “Some fellas like to hit ’em. Gives me a little shakes ever’ time. Car sounds OK. Them rings must a broke loose by now. She ain’t smokin’ so bad.”

“You done a nice job,” said Casy.

A small wooden house dominated the camp ground, and on the porch of the house a gasoline lantern hissed and threw its white glare in a great circle. Half a dozen tents were pitched near the house, and cars stood beside the tents. Cooking for the night was over, but the coals of the campfires still glowed on the ground by the camping places. A group of men had gathered to the porch where the lantern burned, and their faces were strong and muscled under the harsh white light, light that threw black shadows of their hats over their foreheads and eyes and made their chins seem to jut out. They sat on the steps, and some stood on the ground, resting their elbows on the porch floor. The proprietor, a sullen lanky man, sat in a chair on the porch. He leaned back against the wall, and he drummed his fingers on his knee. Inside the house a kerosene lamp burned, but its thin light was blasted by the hissing glare of the gasoline lantern. The gathering of men surrounded the proprietor.

Tom drove the Dodge to the side of the road and parked. Al drove through the gate in the truck. “No need to take her in,” Tom said. He got out and walked through the gate to the white glare of the lantern.

The proprietor dropped his front chair legs to the floor and leaned forward. “You men wanta camp here?”

“No,” said Tom. “We got folks here. Hi, Pa.”

Pa, seated on the bottom step, said, “Thought you was gonna be all week. Get her fixed?”

“We was pig lucky,” said Tom. “Got a part ’fore dark. We can get goin’ fust thing in the mornin’.”

“That’s a pretty nice thing,” said Pa. “Ma’s worried. Ya Granma’s off her chump.”

“Yeah, Al tol’ me. She any better now?”

“Well, anyways she’s a-sleepin’.”

The proprietor said, “If you wanta pull in here an’ camp it’ll cost you four bits. Get a place to camp an’ water an’ wood. An’ nobody won’t bother you.”

“What the hell,” said Tom. “We can sleep in the ditch right beside the road, an’ it won’t cost nothin’.”

The owner drummed his knee with his fingers. “Deputy sheriff comes on by in the night. Might make it tough for ya. Got a law against sleepin’ out in this State. Got a law about vagrants.”

“If I pay you a half a dollar I ain’t a vagrant, huh?”

“That’s right.”

Tom’s eyes glowed angrily. “Deputy sheriff ain’t your brother-’n-law by any chance?”

The owner leaned forward. “No, he ain’t. An’ the time ain’t come yet when us local folks got to take no talk from you goddamn bums, neither.”

“It don’t trouble you none to take our four bits. An’ when’d we get to be bums? We ain’t asked ya for nothin’. All of us bums, huh? Well, we ain’t askin’ no nickels from you for the chance to lay down an’ rest.”

The men on the porch were rigid, motionless, quiet. Expression was gone from their faces; and their eyes, in the shadows under their hats, moved secretly up to the face of the proprietor.

Pa growled, “Come off it, Tom.”

“Sure, I’ll come off it.”

The circle of men were quiet, sitting on the steps, leaning on the high porch. Their eyes glittered under the harsh light of the gas

lantern. Their faces were hard in the hard light, and they were very still. Only their eyes moved from speaker to speaker, and their faces were expressionless and quiet. A lamp bug slammed into the lantern and broke itself, and fell into the darkness.

In one of the tents a child wailed in complaint, and a woman's soft voice soothed it and then broke into a low song, "Jesus loves you in the night. Sleep good, sleep good. Jesus watches in the night. Sleep, oh, sleep, oh."

The lantern hissed on the porch. The owner scratched in the V of his open shirt, where a tangle of white chest hair showed. He was watchful and ringed with trouble. He watched the men in the circle, watched for some expression. And they made no move.

Tom was silent for a long time. His dark eyes looked slowly up at the proprietor. "I don't wanta make no trouble," he said. "It's a hard thing to be named a bum. I ain't afraid," he said softly. "I'll go for you an' your deputy with my mitts—here now, or jump Jesus. But there ain't no good in it."

The men stirred, changed positions, and their glittering eyes moved slowly upward to the mouth of the proprietor, and their eyes watched for his lips to move. He was reassured. He felt that he had won, but not decisively enough to charge in. "Ain't you got half a buck?" he asked.

"Yeah, I got it. But I'm gonna need it. I can't set it out jus' for sleepin'."

"Well, we all got to make a livin'."

"Yeah," Tom said. "On'y I wisht they was some way to make her 'thout takin' her away from somebody else."

The men shifted again. And Pa said, "We'll get movin' smart early. Look, mister. We paid. This here fella is part a our folks. Can't he stay? We paid."

"Half a dollar a car," said the proprietor.

"Well, he ain't got no car. Car's out in the road."

"He came in a car," said the proprietor. "Ever'body'd leave their car out there an' come in an' use my place for nothin'."

Tom said, "We'll drive along the road. Meet ya in the morning. We'll watch for ya. Al can stay an' Uncle John can come with us —" He looked at the proprietor. "That awright with you?"

He made a quick decision, with a concession in it. "If the same

number stays that come an' paid—that's awright."

Tom brought out his bag of tobacco, a limp gray rag by now, with a little damp tobacco dust in the bottom of it. He made a lean cigarette and tossed the bag away. "We'll go along pretty soon," he said.

Pa spoke generally to the circle. "It's dirt hard for folks to tear up an' go. Folks like us that had our place. We ain't shif'less. Till we got tractored off, we was people with a farm."

A young thin man, with eyebrows sunburned yellow, turned his head slowly. "Croppin'?" he asked.

"Sure we was sharecroppin'. Use' ta own the place."

The young man faced forward again. "Same as us," he said.

"Lucky for us it ain't gonna las' long," said Pa. "We'll get out west an' we'll get work an' we'll get a piece a growin' land with water."

Near the edge of the porch a ragged man stood. His black coat dripped torn streamers. The knees were gone from his dungarees. His face was black with dust, and lined where sweat had washed through. He swung his head towards Pa. "You folks must have a nice little pot a money."

"No, we ain't got no money," Pa said. "But they's plenty of us to work, an' we're all good men. Get good wages out there an' we'll put 'em together. We'll make out."

The ragged man stared while Pa spoke, and then he laughed, and his laughter turned to a high whinnying giggle. The circle of faces turned to him. The giggling got out of control and turned into coughing. His eyes were red and watering when he finally controlled the spasms. "You goin' out there—oh, Christ!" The giggling started again. "You goin' out an' get—good wages—oh, Christ!" He stopped and said slyly, "Pickin' oranges maybe? Gonna pick peaches?"

Pa's tone was dignified. "We gonna take what they got. They got lots a stuff to work in." The ragged man giggled under his breath.

Tom turned irritably. "What's so goddamn funny about that?"

The ragged man shut his mouth and looked sullenly at the porch boards. "You folks all goin' to California, I bet."

"I tol' you that," said Pa. "You didn' guess nothin'."

The ragged man said slowly, "Me—I'm comin' back. I been there."

The faces turned quickly toward him. The men were rigid. The hiss of the lantern dropped to a sigh and the proprietor lowered the front chair legs to the porch, stood up, and pumped the lantern until the hiss was sharp and high again. He went back to his chair, but he did not tilt back again. The ragged man turned toward the faces. “I’m goin’ back to starve. I ruther starve all over at oncet.”

Pa said, “What the hell you talkin’ about? I got a han’bill says they got good wages, an’ little while ago I seen a thing in the paper says they need folks to pick fruit.”

The ragged man turned to Pa. “You got any place to go, back home?”

“No,” said Pa. “We’re out. They put a tractor past the house.”

“You wouldn’ go back then?”

“’Course not.”

“Then I ain’t gonna fret you,” said the ragged man.

“’Course you ain’t gonna fret me. I got a han’bill says they need men. Don’t make no sense if they don’t need men. Costs money for them bills. They wouldn’ put ’em out if they didn’ need men.”

“I don’ wanna fret you.”

Pa said angrily, “You done some jackassin’. You ain’t gonna shut up now. My han’bill says they need men. You laugh an’ say they don’t. Now, which one’s a liar?”

The ragged man looked down into Pa’s angry eyes. He looked sorry. “Han’bill’s right,” he said. “They need men.”

“Then why the hell you stirrin’ us up laughin’?”

“’Cause you don’t know what kind a men they need.”

“What you talkin’ about?”

The ragged man reached a decision. “Look,” he said. “How many men they say they want on your han’bill?”

“Eight hunderd, an’ that’s in one little place.”

“Orange color han’bill?”

“Why—yes.”

“Give the name a the fella—says so and so, labor contractor?”

Pa reached in his pocket and brought out the folded handbill. “That’s right. How’d you know?”

“Look,” said the man. “It don’t make no sense. This fella wants eight hunderd men. So he prints up five thousand of them things an’

maybe twenty thousan' people sees 'em. An' maybe two-three thousan' folks gets movin' account a this here han'bill. Folks that's crazy with worry."

"But it don't make no sense!" Pa cried.

"Not till you see the fella that put out this here bill. You'll see him, or somebody that's workin' for him. You'll be a-campin' by a ditch, you an'fifty other famblies. An' he'll look in your tent an' see if you got anything lef' to eat. An' if you got nothin', he says, 'Wanna job?' An' you'll say, 'I sure do, mister. I'll sure thank you for a chance to do some work.' An' he'll say, 'I can use you.' An' you'll say, 'When do I start?' An' he'll tell you where to go, an' what time, an' then he'll go on. Maybe he needs two hunderd men, so he talks to five hunderd, an' they tell other folks, an' when you get to the place, they's a thousan' men. This here fella says, 'I'm payin' twenty cents an hour.' An' maybe half a the men walk off. But they's still five hunderd that's so goddamn hungry they'll work for nothin' but biscuits. Well, this here fella's got a contract to pick them peaches or—chop that cotton. You see now? The more fellas he can get, an' the hungrier, less he's gonna pay. An' he'll get a fella with kids if he can, 'cause—hell, I says I wasn't gonna fret ya." The circle of faces looked coldly at him. The eyes tested his words. The ragged man grew self-conscious. "I says I wasn't gonna fret ya, an' here I'm a-doin' it. You gonna go on. You ain't goin' back." The silence hung on the porch. And the light hissed, and a halo of moths swung around and around the lantern. The ragged man went on nervously, "Lemme tell ya what to do when ya meet that fella says he got work. Lemme tell ya. Ast him what he's gonna pay. Ast him to write down what he's gonna pay. Ast him that. I tell you men you're gonna get fooled if you don't."

The proprietor leaned forward in his chair, the better to see the ragged dirty man. He scratched among the gray hairs on his chest. He said coldly, "You sure you ain't one of these here troublemakers? You sure you ain't a labor faker?"

And the ragged man cried, "I swear to God I ain't!"

"They's plenty of 'em," the proprietor said. "Goin' aroun' stirrin' up trouble. Gettin' folks mad. Chiselin' in. They's plenty of 'em. Time's gonna come when we string 'em all up, all them troublemakers. We gonna run 'em outa the country. Man wants to work, O.K. If he don't—the hell with him. We ain't gonna let him

stir up trouble."

The ragged man drew himself up. "I tried to tell you folks," he said. "Somepin it took me a year to find out. Took two kids dead, took my wife dead to show me. But I can't tell you. I should of knew that. Nobody couldn't tell me, neither. I can't tell ya about them little fellas layin' in the tent with their bellies puffed out an' jus' skin on their bones, an' shiverin' an' whinin' like pups, an' me runnin' aroun' tryin' to get work—not for money, not for wages!" he shouted. "Jesus Christ, jus' for a cup a flour an' a spoon a lard. An' then the coroner come. 'Them children died a heart failure,' he said. Put it on his paper. Shiverin', they was, an' their bellies stuck out like a pig bladder."

The circle was quiet, and mouths were open a little. The men breathed shallowly, and watched.

The ragged man looked around at the circle, and then he turned and walked quickly away into the darkness. The dark swallowed him, but his dragging footsteps could be heard a long time after he had gone, footsteps along the road; and a car came by on the highway, and its lights showed the ragged man shuffling along the road, his head hanging down and his hands in the black coat pockets.

The men were uneasy. One said, "Well—gettin' late. Got to get to sleep."

The proprietor said, "Prob'ly shif'less. They's so goddamn many shif'less fellas on the road now." And then he was quiet. And he tipped his chair back against the wall again and fingered his throat.

Tom said, "Guess I'll go see Ma for a minute, an' then we'll shove along a piece." The Joad men moved away.

Pa said, "S'pose he's tellin' the truth—that fella?"

The preacher answered, "He's tellin' the truth, awright. The truth for him. He wasn't makin' nothin' up."

"How about us?" Tom demanded. "Is that the truth for us?"

"I don' know," said Casy.

"I don' know," said Pa.

They walked to the tent, tarpaulin spread over a rope. And it was dark inside, and quiet. When they came near, a grayish mass stirred near the door and arose to person height. Ma came out to meet them.

“All sleepin’,” she said. “Granma finally dozed off.” Then she saw it was Tom. “How’d you get here?” she demanded anxiously. “You ain’t had no trouble?”

“Got her fixed,” said Tom. “We’re ready to go when the rest is.”

“Thank the dear God for that,” Ma said. “I’m just a-twitterin’ to go on. Wanta get where it’s rich an’ green. Wanta get there quick.”

Pa cleared his throat. “Fella was jus’ sayin’—”

Tom grabbed his arm and yanked it. “Funny what he says,” Tom said. “Says they’s lots a folks on the way.”

Ma peered through the darkness at them. Inside the tent Ruthie coughed and snorted in her sleep. “I washed ’em up,” Ma said. “Fust water we got enough of to give ’em a goin’-over. Lef’ the buckets out for you fellas to wash too. Can’t keep nothin’ clean on the road.”

“Ever’body in?” Pa asked.

“All but Connie an’ Rosasharn. They went off to sleep in the open. Says it’s too warm in under cover.”

Pa observed querulously, “That Rosasharn is gettin’ awful scary an’ nimsy-mimsy.”

“It’s her first,” said Ma. “Her an’ Connie sets a lot a store by it. You done the same thing.”

“We’ll go now,” Tom said. “Pull off the road a little piece ahead. Watch out for us ef we don’t see you. Be off right-han’ side.”

“Al’s stayin’?”

“Yeah. Leave Uncle John come with us. ’Night, Ma.”

They walked away through the sleeping camp. In front of one tent a low fitful fire burned, and a woman watched a kettle that cooked early breakfast. The smell of the cooking beans was strong and fine.

“Like to have a plate a them,” Tom said politely as they went by.

The woman smiled. “They ain’t done or you’d be welcome,” she said. “Come aroun’ in the daybreak.”

“Thank you, ma’am,” Tom said. He and Casy and Uncle John walked by the porch. The proprietor still sat in his chair, and the lantern hissed and flared. He turned his head as the three went by. “Ya runnin’ outa gas,” Tom said.

“Well, time to close up anyways.”

“No more half-bucks rollin’ down the road, I guess,” Tom said.

The chair legs hit the floor. “Don’t you go a-sassin’ me. I ’member you. You’re one of these here troublemakers.”

“Damn right,” said Tom. “I’m bolshevisky.”

“They’s too damn many of you kinda guys aroun’.”

Tom laughed as they went out the gate and climbed into the Dodge. He picked up a clod and threw it at the light. They heard it hit the house and saw the proprietor spring to his feet and peer into the darkness. Tom started the car and pulled into the road. And he listened closely to the motor as it turned over, listened for knocks. The road spread dimly under the weak lights of the car.

Chapter 17

The cars of the migrant people crawled out of the side roads onto the great cross-country highway, and they took the migrant way to the West. In the daylight they scuttled like bugs to the westward; and as the dark caught them, they clustered like bugs near to shelter and to water. And because they were lonely and perplexed, because they had all come from a place of sadness and worry and defeat, and because they were all going to a new mysterious place, they huddled together; they talked together; they shared their lives, their food, and the things they hoped for in the new country. Thus it might be that one family camped near a spring, and another camped for the spring and for company, and a third because two families had pioneered the place and found it good. And when the sun went down, perhaps twenty families and twenty cars were there.

In the evening a strange thing happened: the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream. And it might be that a sick child threw despair into the hearts of twenty families, of a hundred people; that a birth there in a tent kept a hundred people quiet and awestruck through the night and filled a hundred people with the birth-joy in the morning. A family which the night before had been lost and fearful might search its goods to find a present for a new baby. In the evening, sitting about the fires, the twenty were one. They grew to be units of the camps, units of the evenings and the nights. A guitar unwrapped from a blanket and tuned—and the songs, which were all of the people, were sung in the nights. Men sang the words, and women hummed the tunes.

Every night a world created, complete with furniture—friends made and enemies established; a world complete with braggarts and with cowards, with quiet men, with humble men, with kindly men. Every night relationships that make a world, established; and every morning the world torn down like a circus.

At first the families were timid in the building and tumbling worlds, but gradually the technique of building worlds became their technique. Then leaders emerged, then laws were made, then codes

came into being. And as the worlds moved westward they were more complete and better furnished, for their builders were more experienced in building them.

The families learned what rights must be observed—the right of privacy in the tent; the right to keep the past black hidden in the heart; the right to talk and to listen; the right to refuse help or to accept, to offer help or to decline it; the right of son to court and daughter to be courted; the right of the hungry to be fed; the rights of the pregnant and the sick to transcend all other rights.

And the families learned, although no one told them, what rights are monstrous and must be destroyed: the right to intrude upon privacy, the right to be noisy while the camp slept, the right of seduction or rape, the right of adultery and theft and murder. These rights were crushed, because the little worlds could not exist for even a night with such rights alive.

And as the worlds moved westward, rules became laws, although no one told the families. It is unlawful to foul near the camp; it is unlawful in any way to foul the drinking water; it is unlawful to eat good rich food near one who is hungry, unless he is asked to share.

And with the laws, the punishments—and there were only two—a quick and murderous fight or ostracism; and ostracism was the worst. For if one broke the laws his name and face went with him, and he had no place in any world, no matter where created.

In the worlds, social conduct became fixed and rigid, so that a man must say “Good morning” when asked for it, so that a man might have a willing girl if he stayed with her, if he fathered her children and protected them. But a man might not have one girl one night and another the next, for this would endanger the worlds.

The families moved westward, and the technique of building the worlds improved so that the people could be safe in their worlds; and the form was so fixed that a family acting in the rules knew it was safe in the rules.

There grew up government in the worlds, with leaders, with elders. A man who was wise found that his wisdom was needed in every camp; a man who was a fool could not change his folly with his world. And a kind of insurance developed in these nights. A man with food fed a hungry man, and thus insured himself against hunger. And when a baby died a pile of silver coins grew at the door flap, for a baby must be well buried, since it has had nothing

else of life. An old man may be left in a potter's field, but not a baby.

A certain physical pattern is needed for the building of a world—water, a river bank, a stream, a spring, or even a faucet unguarded. And there is needed enough flat land to pitch the tents, a little brush or wood to build the fires. If there is a garbage dump not too far off, all the better; for there can be found equipment—stove tops, a curved fender to shelter the fire, and cans to cook in and to eat from.

And the worlds were built in the evening. The people, moving in from the highways, made them with their tents and their hearts and their brains.

In the morning the tents came down, the canvas was folded, the tent poles tied along the running board, the beds put in place on the cars, the pots in their places. And as the families moved westward, the technique of building up a home in the evening and tearing it down with the morning light became fixed; so that the folded tent was packed in one place, the cooking pots counted in their box. And as the cars moved westward, each member of the family grew into his proper place, grew into his duties; so that each member, old and young, had his place in the car; so that in the weary, hot evenings, when the cars pulled into the camping places, each member had his duty and went to it without instruction: children to gather wood, to carry water; men to pitch the tents and bring down the beds; women to cook the supper and to watch while the family fed. And this was done without command. The families, which had been units of which the boundaries were a house at night, a farm by day, changed their boundaries. In the long hot light, they were silent in the cars moving slowly westward; but at night they integrated with any group they found.

Thus they changed their social life—changed as in the whole universe only man can change. They were not farm men any more, but migrant men. And the thought, the planning, the long staring silence that had gone out to the fields, went now to the roads, to the distance, to the West. That man whose mind had been bound with acres lived with narrow concrete miles. And his thought and his worry were not any more with rainfall, with wind and dust, with the thrust of the crops. Eyes watched the tires, ears listened to the clattering motors, and minds struggled with oil, with gasoline,

with the thinning rubber between air and road. Then a broken gear was tragedy. Then water in the evening was the yearning, and food over the fire. Then health to go on was the need and strength to go on, and spirit to go on. The wills thrust westward ahead of them, and fears that had once apprehended drought or flood now lingered with anything that might stop the westward crawling.

The camps became fixed—each a short day's journey from the last.

And on the road the panic overcame some of the families, so that they drove night and day, stopped to sleep in the cars, and drove on to the West, flying from the road, flying from movement. And these lusted so greatly to be settled that they set their faces into the West and drove toward it, forcing the clashing engines over the roads.

But most of the families changed and grew quickly into the new life. And when the sun went down——

Time to look out for a place to stop.

And—there's some tents ahead.

The car pulled off the road and stopped, and because others were there first, certain courtesies were necessary. And the man, the leader of the family, leaned from the car.

Can we pull up here an' sleep?

Why, sure, be proud to have you. What State you from?

Come all the way from Arkansas.

They's Arkansas people down that fourth tent.

That so?

And the great question. How's the water?

Well, she don't taste so good, but they's plenty.

Well, thank ya.

No thanks to me.

But the courtesies had to be. The car lumbered over the ground to the end tent, and stopped. Then down from the car the weary people climbed, and stretched stiff bodies. Then the new tent sprang up; the children went for water and the older boys cut brush or wood. The fires started and supper was put on to boil or to fry. Early comers moved over, and States were exchanged, and friends and sometimes relatives discovered.

Oklahoma, huh? What county?

Cherokee.

Why, I got folks there. Know the Allens? They's Allens all over Cherokee. Know the Willises?

Why, sure.

And a new unit was formed. The dusk came, but before the dark was down the new family was of the camp. A word had been passed with every family. They were known people—good people.

I knowed the Allens all my life. Simon Allen, ol' Simon, had trouble with his first wife. She was part Cherokee. Purty as—as a black colt.

Sure, an' young Simon, he married a Rudolph, didn't he? That's what I thought. They went to live in Enid an' done well—real well.

Only Allen that ever done well. Got a garage.

When the water was carried and the wood cut, the children walked shyly, cautiously among the tents. And they made elaborate acquaintanceship gestures. A boy stopped near another boy and studied a stone, picked it up, examined it closely, spat on it, and rubbed it clean and inspected it until he forced the other to demand, What you go there?

And casually, Nothin'. Jus' a rock.

Well, what you lookin' at it like that for?

Thought I seen gold in it.

How'd you know? Gold ain't gold, it's black in a rock.

Sure, ever'body knows that.

I bet it's fool's gold, an' you figgered it was gold.

That ain't so, 'cause Pa, he's foun' lots a gold an' he tol' me how to look.

How'd you like to pick up a big ol' piece a gold?

Sa-a-ay! I'd git the bigges' old son-a-bitchin' piece a candy you ever seen.

I ain't let to swear, but I do, anyways.

Me too. Le's go to the spring.

And young girls found each other and boasted shyly of their popularity and their prospects. The women worked over the fire, hurrying to get food to the stomachs of the family—pork if there was money in plenty, pork and potatoes and onions. Dutch-oven biscuits or cornbread, and plenty of gravy to go over it. Side-meat

or chops and a can of boiled tea, black and bitter. Fried dough in drippings if money was slim, dough fried crisp and brown and the drippings poured over it.

Those families which were very rich or very foolish with their money ate canned beans and canned peaches and packaged bread and bakery cake; but they ate secretly, in their tents, for it would not have been good to eat such fine things openly. Even so, children eating their fried dough smelled the warming beans and were unhappy about it.

When supper was over and the dishes dipped and wiped, the dark had come, and then the men squatted down to talk.

And they talked of the land behind them. I don' know what it's coming to, they said. The country's spoilt.

It'll come back though, on'y we won't be there.

Maybe, they thought, maybe we sinned some way we didn't know about.

Fella says to me, gov'ment fella, an' he says, she's gullied up on ya. Gov'ment fella. He says, if ya plowed 'cross the contour, she won't gully. Never did have no chance to try her. An' the new super' ain't plowin' 'cross the contour. Runnin' a furrow four miles long that ain't stoppin' or goin' aroun' Jesus Christ Hisself.

And they spoke softly of their homes: They was a little cool-house under the win'mill. Use' ta keep milk in there ta cream up, an' watermelons. Go in there midday when she was hotter'n a heifer, an' she'd be jus' as cool, as cool as you'd want. Cut open a melon in there an' she'd hurt your mouth, she was so cool. Water drippin' down from the tank.

They spoke of their tragedies: Had a brother Charley, hair as yella as corn, an' him a growed man. Played the 'cordeen nice too. He was harrowin' one day an' he went up to clear his lines. Well, a rattlesnake buzzed an' them horses bolted an' the harrow went over Charley, an' the points dug into his guts an' his stomach, an' they pulled his face off an'—God Almighty!

They spoke of the future: Wonder what it's like out there?

Well, the pitchers sure do look nice. I seen one where it's hot an' fine, an' walnut trees an' berries; an' right behind, close as a mule's ass to his withers, they's a tall up mountain covered with snow. That was a pretty thing to see.

If we can get work it'll be fine. Won't have no cold in the winter. Kids won't freeze on the way to school. I'm gonna take care my kids don't miss no more school. I can read good, but it ain't no pleasure to me like with a fella that's used to it.

And perhaps a man brought out his guitar to the front of his tent. And he sat on a box to play, and everyone in the camp moved slowly in toward him, drawn in toward him. Many men can chord a guitar, but perhaps this man was a picker. There you have something—the deep chords beating, beating, while the melody runs on the strings like little footsteps. Heavy hard fingers marching on the frets. The man played and the people moved slowly in on him until the circle was closed and tight, and then he sang "Ten-Cent Cotton and Forty-Cent Meat." And the circle sang softly with him. And he sang "Why Do You Cut Your Hair, Girls?" And the circle sang. He wailed the song, "I'm Leaving Old Texas," that eerie song that was sung before the Spaniards came, only the words were Indian then.

And now the group was welded to one thing, one unit, so that in the dark the eyes of the people were inward, and their minds played in other times, and their sadness was like rest, like sleep. He sang the "McAlester Blues" and then, to make up for it to the older people, he sang "Jesus Calls Me to His Side." The children drowsed with the music and went into the tents to sleep, and the singing came into their dreams.

And after a while the man with the guitar stood up and yawned. Good night, folks, he said.

And they murmured, Good night to you.

And each wished he could pick a guitar, because it is a gracious thing. Then the people went to their beds, and the camp was quiet. And the owls coasted overhead, and the coyotes gabbled in the distance, and into the camp skunks walked, looking for bits of food —waddling, arrogant skunks, afraid of nothing.

The night passed, and with the first streak of dawn the women came out of the tents, built up the fires, and put the coffee to boil. And the men came out and talked softly in the dawn.

When you cross the Colorado river, there's the desert, they say. Look out for the desert. See you don't get hung up. Take plenty water, case you get hung up.

I'm gonna take her at night.

Me too. She'll cut the living Jesus outa you.

The families ate quickly, and the dishes were dipped and wiped. The tents came down. There was a rush to go. And when the sun arose, the camping place was vacant, only a little litter left by the people. And the camping place was ready for a new world in a new night.

But along the highway the cars of the migrant people crawled out like bugs, and the narrow concrete miles stretched ahead.

Chapter 18

The Joad family moved slowly westward, up into the mountains of New Mexico, past the pinnacles and pyramids of the upland. They climbed into the high country of Arizona, and through a gap they looked down on the Painted Desert. A border guard stopped them.

"Where you going?"

"To California," said Tom.

"How long you plan to be in Arizona?"

"No longer'n we can get acrost her."

"Got any plants?"

"No plants."

"I ought to look your stuff over."

"I tell you we ain't got no plants."

The guard put a little sticker on the windshield.

"O.K. Go ahead, but you better keep movin'."

"Sure. We aim to."

They crawled up the slopes, and the low twisted trees covered the slopes. Holbrook, Joseph City, Winslow. And then the tall trees began, and the cars spouted steam and labored up the slopes. And there was Flagstaff, and that was the top of it all. Down from Flagstaff over the great plateaus, and the road disappeared in the distance ahead. The water grew scarce, water was to be bought, five cents, ten cents, fifteen cents a gallon. The sun drained the dry rocky country, and ahead were jagged broken peaks, the western wall of Arizona. And now they were in flight from the sun and the drought. They drove all night, and came to the mountains in the night. And they crawled the jagged ramparts in the night, and their dim lights flickered on the pale stone walls of the road. They passed the summit in the dark and came slowly down in the late night, through the shattered stone debris of Oatman; and when the daylight came they saw the Colorado river below them. They drove to Topock, pulled up at the bridge while a guard washed off the windshield sticker. Then across the bridge and into the broken rock wilderness. And although they were dead weary and the morning heat was growing, they stopped.

Pa called, "We're there—we're in California!" They looked dully

at the broken rock glaring under the sun, and across the river the terrible ramparts of Arizona.

“We got the desert,” said Tom. “We got to get to the water and rest.”

The road runs parallel to the river, and it was well into the morning when the burning motors came to Needles, where the river runs swiftly among the reeds.

The Joads and Wilsons drove to the river, and they sat in the cars looking at the lovely water flowing by, and the green reeds jerking slowly in the current. There was a little encampment by the river, eleven tents near the water, and the swamp grass on the ground. And Tom leaned out of the truck window. “Mind if we stop here a piece?”

A stout woman, scrubbing clothes in a bucket, looked up. “We don’t own it, mister. Stop if you want. They’ll be a cop down to look you over.” And she went back to her scrubbing in the sun.

The two cars pulled to a clear place on the swamp grass. The tents were passed down, the Wilson tent set up, the Joad tarpaulin stretched over its rope.

Winfield and Ruthie walked slowly down through the willows to the reedy place. Ruthie said, with soft vehemence, “California. This here’s California an’ we’re right in it!”

Winfield broke a tule and twisted it free, and he put the white pulp in his mouth and chewed it. They walked into the water and stood quietly, the water about the calves of their legs.

“We got the desert yet,” Ruthie said.

“What’s the desert like?”

“I don’t know. I seen pitchers once says a desert. They was bones ever’place.”

“Man bones?”

“Some, I guess, but mos’ly cow bones.”

“We gonna get to see them bones?”

“Maybe. I don’ know. Gonna go ’crost her at night. That’s what Tom said. Tom says we get the livin’ Jesus burned outa us if we go in daylight.”

“Feels nicet an’ cool,” said Winfield, and he squidged his toes in the sand of the bottom.

They heard Ma calling, “Ruthie! Winfiel’! You come back.” They turned and walked slowly back through the reeds and the willows.

The other tents were quiet. For a moment, when the cars came up, a few heads had stuck out between the flaps, and then were withdrawn. Now the family tents were up and the men gathered together.

Tom said, “I’m gonna go down an’ take a bath. That’s what I’m gonna do—before I sleep. How’s Granma sence we got her in the tent?”

“Don’ know,” said Pa. “Couldn’ seem to wake her up.” He cocked his head toward the tent. A whining, babbling voice came from under the canvas. Ma went quickly inside.

“She woke up, awright,” said Noah. “Seems like all night she was a-croakin’ up on the truck. She’s all outa sense.”

Tom said, “Hell! She’s wore out. If she don’t get some res’ pretty soon, she ain’ gonna las’. She’s jes’ wore out. Anybody comin’ with me? I’m gonna wash, an’ I’m gonna sleep in the shade—all day long.” He moved away, and the other men followed him. They took off their clothes in the willows and then they walked into the water and sat down. For a long time they sat, holding themselves with heels dug into the sand, and only their heads stuck out of the water.

“Jesus, I needed this,” Al said. He took a handful of sand from the bottom and scrubbed himself with it. They lay in the water and looked across at the sharp peaks called Needles, and at the white rock mountains of Arizona.

“We come through them,” Pa said in wonder.

Uncle John ducked his head under the water. “Well, we’re here. This here’s California, an’ she don’t look so prosperous.”

“Got the desert yet,” said Tom. “An’ I hear she’s a son-of-a-bitch.”

Noah asked, “Gonna try her tonight?”

“What ya think, Pa?” Tom asked.

“Well, I don’ know. Do us good to get a little res’, ’specially Granma. But other ways, I’d kinda like to get acrost her an’ get settled into a job. On’y got ’bout forty dollars left. I’ll feel better when we’re all workin’, an’ a little money comin’ in.”

Each man sat in the water and felt the tug of the current. The preacher let his arms and hands float on the surface. The bodies were white to the neck and wrists, and burned dark brown on

hands and faces, with V's of brown at the collar bones. They scratched themselves with sand.

And Noah said lazily, "Like to jus' stay here. Like to lay here forever. Never get hungry an' never get sad. Lay in the water all life long, lazy as a brood sow in the mud."

And Tom, looking at the ragged peaks across the river and the Needles downstream: "Never seen such tough mountains. This here's a murder country. This here's the bones of a country. Wonder if we'll ever get in a place where folks can live 'thout fightin' hard scrabble an' rocks. I seen pitchers of a country flat an' green, an' with little houses like Ma says, white. Ma got her heart set on a white house. Get to thinkin' they ain't no such country. I seen pitchers like that."

Pa said, "Wait till we get to California. You'll see nice country then."

"Jesus Christ, Pa! This here *is* California."

Two men dressed in jeans and sweaty blue shirts came through the willows and looked toward the naked men. They called, "How's the swimmin'?"

"Dunno," said Tom. "We ain't tried none. Sure feels good to set here, though."

"Mind if we come in an' set?"

"She ain't our river. We'll len' you a little piece of her."

The men shucked off their pants, peeled their shirts, and waded out. The dust coated their legs to the knee; their feet were pale and soft with sweat. They settled lazily into the water and washed listlessly at their flanks. Sun-bitten, they were, a father and a boy. They grunted and groaned with the water.

Pa asked politely, "Goin' west?"

"Nope. We come from there. Goin' back home. We can't make no livin' out there."

"Where's home?" Tom asked.

"Panhandle, come from near Pampa."

Pa asked, "Can you make a livin' there?"

"Nope. But at leas' we can starve to death with folks we know. Won't have a bunch a fellas that hates us to starve with."

Pa said, "Ya know, you're the second fella talked like that. What

makes 'em hate you?"

"Dunno," said the man. He cupped his hands full of water and rubbed his face, snorting and bubbling. Dusty water ran out of his hair and streaked his neck.

"I like to hear some more 'bout this," said Pa.

"Me too," Tom added. "Why these folks out west hate ya?"

The man looked sharply at Tom. "You jus' goin' wes'?"

"Jus' on our way."

"You ain't never been in California?"

"No, we ain't."

"Well, don' take my word. Go see for yourself."

"Yeah," Tom said, "but a fella kind a likes to know what he's gettin' into."

"Well, if you truly wanta know, I'm a fella that's asked questions an' give her some thought. She's a nice country. But she was stole a long time ago. You git acrost the desert an' come into the country aroun' Bakersfield. An' you never seen such purty country—all orchards an' grapes, purtiest country you ever seen. An' you'll pass lan' flat an'fine with water thirty feet down, and that lan's layin' fallow. But you can't have none of that lan'. That's a Lan' and Cattle Company. An' if they don't want ta work her, she ain't gonna git worked. You go in there an' plant you a little corn, an' you'll go to jail!"

"Good lan', you say? An' they ain't workin' her?"

"Yes, sir. Good lan' an' they ain't! Well, sir, that'll get you a little mad, but you ain't seen nothin'. People gonna have a look in their eye. They gonna look at you an' their face says, 'I don't like you, you son-of-a-bitch.' Gonna be deputy sheriffs, an' they'll push you aroun'. You camp on the roadside, an' they'll move you on. You gonna see in people's face how they hate you. An'—I'll tell you somepin. They hate you 'cause they're scairt. They know a hungry fella gonna get food even if he got to take it. They know that fallow lan's a sin an' somebody' gonna take it. What the hell! You never been called 'Okie' yet."

Tom said, "Okie? What's that?"

"Well, Okie use' ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you're a dirty son-of-a-bitch. Okie means you're scum. Don't mean nothing itself, it's the way they say it. But I can't tell you nothin'.

You got to go there. I hear there's three hunderd thousan' of our people there—an' livin' like hogs, 'cause ever'thing in California is owned. They ain't nothin' left. An' them people that owns it is gonna hang on to it if they got ta kill ever'body in the worl' to do it. An' they're scairt, an' that makes 'em mad. You got to see it. You got to hear it. Purtiest goddamn country you ever seen, but they ain't nice to you, them folks. They're so scairt an' worried they ain't even nice to each other."

Tom looked down into the water, and he dug his heels into the sand. "S'pose a fella got work an' saved, couldn' he get a little lan'?"

The older man laughed and he looked at his boy, and his silent boy grinned almost in triumph. And the man said, "You ain't gonna get no steady work. Gonna scrabble for your dinner ever' day. An' you gonna do her with people lookin' mean at you. Pick cotton, an' you gonna be sure the scales ain't honest. Some of 'em is, an' some of 'em ain't. But you gonna think all the scales is crooked, an' you don' know which ones. Ain't nothin' you can do about her anyways."

Pa asked slowly, "Ain't—ain't it nice out there at all?"

"Sure, nice to look at, but you can't have none of it. They's a grove of yella oranges—an' a guy with a gun that got the right to kill you if you touch one. They's a fella, newspaper fella near the coast, got a million acres——"

Casy looked up quickly, "Million acres? What in the worl' can he do with a million acres?"

"I dunno. He jus' got it. Runs a few cattle. Got guards ever'place to keep folks out. Rides aroun' in a bullet-proof car. I seen pitchers of him. Fat, sof' fella with little mean eyes an' a mouth like a asshole. Scairt he's gonna die. Got a million acres an' scairt of dyin'."

Casy demanded, "What in hell can he do with a million acres? What's he want a million acres for?"

The man took his whitening, puckering hands out of the water and spread them, and he tightened his lower lip and bent his head down to one shoulder. "I dunno," he said. "Guess he's crazy. Mus' be crazy. Seen a pitcher of him. He looks crazy. Crazy an' mean."

"Say he's scairt to die?" Casy asked.

"That's what I heard."

"Scairt God'll get him?"

“I dunno. Jus’ scairt.”

“What’s he care?” Pa said. “Don’t seem like he’s havin’ no fun.”

“Grampa wasn’t scairt,” Tom said. “When Grampa was havin’ the most fun, he come clostest to gettin’ kil’t. Time Grampa an’ another fella whanged into a bunch a Navajo in the night. They was havin’ the time a their life, an’ same time you wouldn’t give a gopher for their chance.”

Casy said, “Seems like that’s the way. Fella havin’ fun, he don’t give a damn; but a fella mean an’ lonely an’ old an’ disappointed—he’s scared of dyin’!”

Pa asked, “What’s he disappointed about if he got a million acres?”

The preacher smiled, and he looked puzzled. He splashed a floating water bug away with his hand. “If he needs a million acres to make him feel rich, seems to me he needs it ’cause he feels awful poor inside hisself, and if he’s poor in hisself, there ain’t no million acres gonna make him feel rich, an’ maybe he’s disappointed that nothin’ he can do’ll make him feel rich—not rich like Mis’ Wilson was when she give her tent when Grampa died. I ain’t tryin’ to preach no sermon, but I never seen nobody that’s busy as a prairie dog collectin’ stuff that wasn’t disappointed.” He grinned. “Does kinda soun’ like a sermon, don’t it?”

The sun was flaming fiercely now. Pa said, “Better scrunch down under water. She’ll burn the living Jesus outa you.” And he reclined and let the gently moving water flow around his neck. “If a fella’s willin’ to work hard, can’t he cut her?” Pa asked.

The man sat up and faced him. “Look, mister. I don’ know ever’thing. You might go out there an’ fall into a steady job, an’ I’d be a liar. An’ then, you might never get no work, an’ I didn’ warn ya. I can tell ya mos’ of the folks is purty mis’able.” He lay back in the water. “A fella don’ know ever’thing,” he said.

Pa turned his head and looked at Uncle John. “You never was a fella to say much,” Pa said. “But I’ll be goddamned if you opened your mouth twicet sence we lef’ home. What you think ’bout this here?”

Uncle John scowled. “I don’t think nothin’ about it. We’re a-goin’ there, ain’t we? None of this here talk gonna keep us from goin’ there. When we get there, we’ll get there. When we get a job we’ll

work, an' when we don't get a job we'll set on our tail. This here talk ain't gonna do no good no way."

Tom lay back and filled his mouth with water, and he spurted it into the air and he laughed. "Uncle John don't talk much, but he talks sense. Yes, by God! He talks sense. We goin' on tonight, Pa?"

"Might's well. Might's well get her over."

"Well, I'm goin' up in the brush an' get some sleep then." Tom stood up and waded to the sandy shore. He slipped his clothes on his wet body and winced under the heat of the cloth. The others followed him.

In the water, the man and his boy watched the Joads disappear. And the boy said, "Like to see 'em in six months. Jesus!"

The man wiped his eye corners with his forefinger. "I shouldn' of did that," he said. "Fella always wants to be a wise guy, wants to tell folks stuff."

"Well, Jesus, Pa! They asked for it."

"Yeah, I know. But like that fella says, they're a-goin' anyways. Nothin' won't be changed from what I tol' 'em, 'cept they'll be mis'able 'fore they hafta."

Tom walked in among the willows, and he crawled into a cave of shade to lie down. And Noah followed him.

"Gonna sleep here," Tom said.

"Tom!"

"Yeah?"

"Tom, I ain't a-goin' on."

Tom sat up. "What you mean?"

"Tom, I ain't a-gonna leave this here water. I'm a-gonna walk on down this here river."

"You're crazy," Tom said.

"Get myself a piece a line. I'll catch fish. Fella can't starve beside a nice river."

Tom said, "How 'bout the fam'ly? How 'bout Ma?"

"I can't he'p it. I can't leave this here water." Noah's wideset eyes were half closed. "You know how it is, Tom. You know how the folks are nice to me. But they don't really care for me."

"You're crazy."

"No, I ain't. I know how I am. I know they're sorry. But—Well, I ain't a-goin'. You tell Ma—Tom."

"Now you look-a-here," Tom began.

"No. It ain't no use. I was in that there water. An' I ain't a-gonna leave her. I'm a-gonna go now, Tom—down the river. I'll catch fish an' stuff, but I can't leave her. I can't." He crawled back out of the willow cave. "You tell Ma, Tom." He walked away.

Tom followed him to the river bank. "Listen, you goddamn fool ____"

"It ain't no use," Noah said. "I'm sad, but I can't he'p it. I got to go." He turned abruptly and walked downstream along the shore. Tom started to follow, and then he stopped. He saw Noah disappear into the brush, and then appear again, following the edge of the river. And he watched Noah growing smaller on the edge of the river, until he disappeared into the willows at last. And Tom took off his cap and scratched his head. He went back to his willow cave and lay down to sleep.

Under the spread tarpaulin Granma lay on a mattress, and Ma sat beside her. The air was stiflingly hot, and the flies buzzed in the shade of the canvas. Granma was naked under a long piece of pink curtain. She turned her old head restlessly from side to side, and she muttered and choked. Ma sat on the ground beside her, and with a piece of cardboard drove the flies away and fanned a stream of moving hot air over the tight old face. Rose of Sharon sat on the other side and watched her mother.

Granma called imperiously, "Will! Will! You come here, Will." And her eyes opened and she looked fiercely about. "Tol' him to come right here," she said. "I'll catch him. I'll take the hair off 'n him." She closed her eyes and rolled her head back and forth and muttered thickly. Ma fanned with the cardboard.

Rose of Sharon looked helplessly at the old woman. She said softly, "She's awful sick."

Ma raised her eyes to the girl's face. Ma's eyes were patient, but the lines of strain were on her forehead. Ma fanned and fanned the air, and her piece of cardboard warned off the flies. "When you're young, Rosasharn, ever'thing that happens is a thing all by itself. It's a lonely thing. I know, I 'member, Rosasharn." Her mouth loved the name of her daughter. "You're gonna have a baby, Rosasharn,

and that's somepin to you lonely and away. That's gonna hurt you, an' the hurt'll be lonely hurt, an' this here tent is alone in the worl', Rosasharn." She whipped the air for a moment to drive a buzzing blow fly on, and the big shining fly circled the tent twice and zoomed out into the blinding sunlight. And Ma went on, "They's a time of change, an' when that comes, dyin' is a piece of all dyin', and bearin' is a piece of all bearin', an' bearin' an' dyin' is two pieces of the same thing. An' then things ain't lonely any more. An' then a hurt don't hurt so bad, 'cause it ain't a lonely hurt no more, Rosasharn. I wisht I could tell you so you'd know, but I can't." And her voice was so soft, so full of love, that tears crowded into Rose of Sharon's eyes, and flowed over her eyes and blinded her.

"Take an' fan Granma," Ma said, and she handed the cardboard to her daughter. "That's a good thing to do. I wisht I could tell you so you'd know."

Granma, scowling her brows down over her closed eyes, bleated, "Will! You're dirty! You ain't never gonna get clean." Her little wrinkled claws moved up and scratched her cheek. A red ant ran up the curtain cloth and scrambled over the folds of loose skin on the old lady's neck. Ma reached quickly and picked it off, crushed it between thumb and forefinger, and brushed her fingers on her dress.

Rose of Sharon waved the cardboad fan. She looked up at Ma. "She—?" And the words parched in her throat.

"Wipe your feet, Will—you dirty pig!" Granma cried.

Ma said, "I dunno. Maybe if we can get her where it ain't so hot, but I dunno. Don't worry yourself, Rosasharn. Take your breath in when you need it, an' let it go when you need to."

A large woman in a torn black dress looked into the tent. Her eyes were bleared and indefinite, and the skin sagged to her jowls and hung down in little flaps. Her lips were loose, so that the upper lip hung like a curtain over her teeth, and her lower lip, by its weight, folded outward, showing her lower gums. "Mornin', ma'am," she said. "Mornin', an' praise God for victory."

Ma looked around. "Mornin'," she said.

The woman stooped into the tent and bent her head over Granma. "We heerd you got a soul here ready to join her Jesus. Praise God!"

Ma's face tightened and her eyes grew sharp. "She's tar'd, tha's all," Ma said. "She's wore out with the road an' the heat. She's jus' wore out. Get a little res', an' she'll be well."

The woman leaned down over Granma's face, and she seemed almost to sniff. Then she turned to Ma and nodded quickly, and her lips jiggled and her jowls quivered. "A dear soul gonna join her Jesus," she said.

Ma cried, "That ain't so!"

The woman nodded, slowly, this time, and put a puffy hand on Granma's forehead. Ma reached to snatch the hand away, and quickly restrained herself. "Yes, it's so, sister," the woman said. "We got six in Holiness in our tent. I'll go git 'em, an' we'll hol' a meetin'—a prayer an' grace. Jehovites, all. Six, countin' me. I'll go git 'em out."

Ma stiffened. "No—no," she said. "No, Granma's tar'd. She couldn't stan' a meetin'."

The woman said, "Couldn't stan' grace? Couldn' stan' the sweet breath of Jesus? What you talkin' about, sister?"

Ma said, "No, not here. She's too tar'd."

The woman looked reproachfully at Ma. "Ain't you believers, ma'am?"

"We always been Holiness," Ma said, "but Granma's tar'd, an' we been a-goin' all night. We won't trouble you."

"It ain't no trouble, an' if it was, we'd want ta do it for a soul a-soarin' to the Lamb."

Ma arose to her knees. "We thank ya," she said coldly. "We ain't gonna have no meetin' in this here tent."

The woman looked at her for a long time. "Well, we ain't a-gonna let a sister go away 'thout a little praisin'. We'll git the meetin' goin' in our own tent, ma'am. An' we'll forgive ya for your hard heart."

Ma settled back again and turned her face to Granma, and her face was still set and hard. "She's tar'd," Ma said. "She's on'y tar'd." Granma swung her head back and forth and muttered under her breath.

The woman walked stiffly out of the tent. Ma continued to look down at the old face.

Rose of Sharon fanned her cardboard and moved the hot air in a stream. She said, "Ma!"

"Yeah?"

"Whyn't ya let 'em hol' a meetin'?"

"I dunno," said Ma. "Jehovites is good people. They're howlers an' jumpers. I dunno. Somepin jus' come over me. I didn' think I could stan' it. I'd jus'fly all apart."

From some little distance there came the sound of the beginning meeting, a sing-song chant of exhortation. The words were not clear, only the tone. The voice rose and fell, and went higher at each rise. Now a response filled in the pause, and the exhortation went up with a tone of triumph, and a growl of power came into the voice. It swelled and paused, and a growl came into the response. And now gradually the sentences of exhortation shortened, grew sharper, like commands; and into the responses came a complaining note. The rhythm quickened. Male and female voices had been one tone, but now in the middle of a response one woman's voice went up and up in a wailing cry, wild and fierce, like the cry of a beast; and a deeper woman's voice rose up beside it, a baying voice, and a man's voice traveled up the scale in the howl of a wolf. The exhortation stopped, and only the feral howling came from the tent, and with it a thudding sound on the earth. Ma shivered. Rose of Sharon's breath was panting and short, and the chorus of howls went on so long it seemed that lungs must burst.

Ma said, "Makes me nervous. Somepin happened to me."

Now the high voice broke into hysteria, the gabbling screams of a hyena, the thudding became louder. Voices cracked and broke, and then the whole chorus fell to a sobbing, grunting undertone, and the slap of flesh and the thuddings on the earth; and the sobbing changed to a little whining, like that of a litter of puppies at a food dish.

Rose of Sharon cried softly with nervousness. Granma kicked the curtain off her legs, which lay like gray, knotted sticks. And Granma whined with the whining in the distance. Ma pulled the curtain back in place. And then Granma sighed deeply and her breathing grew steady and easy, and her closed eyelids ceased their flicking. She slept deeply, and snored through her half-open mouth. The whining from the distance was softer and softer until it could not be heard at all any more.

Rose of Sharon looked at Ma, and her eyes were blank with tears. "It done good," said Rose of Sharon. "It done Granma good. She's a-

sleepin'."

Ma's head was down, and she was ashamed. "Maybe I done them good people wrong. Granma is asleep."

"Whyn't you ast our preacher if you done a sin?" the girl asked.

"I will—but he's a queer man. Maybe it's him made me tell them people they couldn't come here. That preacher, he's gettin' roun' to thinkin' that what people does is right to do." Ma looked at her hands, and then she said, "Rosasharn, we got to sleep. 'F we're gonna go tonight, we got to sleep." She stretched out on the ground beside the mattress.

Rose of Sharon asked, "How about fannin' Granma?"

"She's asleep now. You lay down an' rest."

"I wonder where at Connie is?" the girl complained. "I ain't seen him around for a long time."

Ma said, "Sh! Get some rest."

"Ma, Connie gonna study nights an' get to be somepin."

"Yeah. You tol' me about that. Get some rest."

The girl lay down on the edge of Granma's mattress. "Connie's got a new plan. He's thinkin' all a time. When he gets all up on 'lectricity he gonna have his own store, an' then guess what we gonna have?"

"What?"

"Ice—all the ice you want. Gonna have a ice box. Keep it full. Stuff don't spoil if you got ice."

"Connie's thinkin' all a time," Ma chuckled. "Better get some rest now."

Rose of Sharon closed her eyes. Ma turned over on her back and crossed her hands under her head. She listened to Granma's breathing and to the girl's breathing. She moved a hand to start a fly from her forehead. The camp was quiet in the blinding heat, but the noises of hot grass—of crickets, the hum of flies—were a tone that was close to silence. Ma sighed deeply and then yawned and closed her eyes. In her half-sleep she heard footsteps approaching, but it was a man's voice that started her awake.

"Who's in here?"

Ma sat up quickly. A brown-faced man bent over and looked in. He wore boots and khaki pants and a khaki shirt with epaulets. On

a Sam Browne belt a pistol holster hung, and a big silver star was pinned to his shirt at the left breast. A loose-crowned military cap was on the back of his head. He beat on the tarpaulin with his hand, and the tight canvas vibrated like a drum.

"Who's in here?" he demanded again.

Ma asked, "What is it you want, mister?"

"What you think I want? I want to know who's in here."

"Why, they's jus' us three in here. Me an' Granma an' my girl."

"Where's your men?"

"Why, they went down to clean up. We was drivin' all night."

"Where'd you come from?"

"Right near Sallisaw, Oklahoma."

"Well, you can't stay here."

"We aim to get out tonight an' cross the desert, mister."

"Well, you better. If you're here tomorra this time I'll run you in. We don't want none of you settlin' down here."

Ma's face blackened with anger. She got slowly to her feet. She stooped to the utensil box and picked out the iron skillet. "Mister," she said, "you got a tin button an' a gun. Where I come from, you keep your voice down." She advanced on him with the skillet. He loosened the gun in the holster. "Go ahead," said Ma. "Scarin' women. I'm thankful the men folks ain't here. They'd tear ya to pieces. In my country you watch your tongue."

The man took two steps backward. "Well, you ain't in your country now. You're in California, an' we don't want you goddamn Okies settlin' down."

Ma's advance stopped. She looked puzzled. "Okies?" she said softly. "Okies."

"Yeah, Okies! An' if you're here when I come tomorra, I'll run ya in." He turned and walked to the next tent and banged on the canvas with his hand. "Who's in here?" he said.

Ma went slowly back under the tarpaulin. She put the skillet in the utensil box. She sat down slowly. Rose of Sharon watched her secretly. And when she saw Ma fighting with her face, Rose of Sharon closed her eyes and pretended to be asleep.

The sun sank low in the afternoon, but the heat did not seem to

decrease. Tom awakened under his willow, and his mouth was parched and his body was wet with sweat, and his head was dissatisfied with his rest. He staggered to his feet and walked toward the water. He peeled off his clothes and waded into the stream. And the moment the water was about him, his thirst was gone. He lay back in the shallows and his body floated. He held himself in place with his elbows in the sand, and looked at his toes, which bobbed above the surface.

A pale skinny little boy crept like an animal through the reeds and slipped off his clothes. And he squirmed into the water like a muskrat, and pulled himself along like a muskrat, only his eyes and nose above the surface. Then suddenly he saw Tom's head and saw that Tom was watching him. He stopped his game and sat up.

Tom said, "Hello."

"'Lo!"

"Looks like you was playin' mushrat."

"Well, I was." He edged gradually away toward the bank; he moved casually, and then he leaped out, gathered his clothes with a sweep of his arms, and was gone among the willows.

Tom laughed quietly. And then he heard his name called shrilly. "Tom, oh, Tom!" He sat up in the water and whistled through his teeth, a piercing whistle with a loop on the end. The willows shook, and Ruthie stood looking at him.

"Ma wants you," she said. "Ma wants you right away."

"Awright." He stood up and strode through the water to the shore; and Ruthie looked with interest and amazement at his naked body.

Tom seeing the direction of her eyes, said, "Run on now. Git!" And Ruthie ran. Tom heard her calling excitedly for Winfield as she went. He put the hot clothes on his cool, wet body and he walked slowly up through the willows toward the tent.

Ma had started a fire of dry willow twigs, and she had a pan of water heating. She looked relieved when she saw him.

"What's a matter, Ma?" he asked.

"I was scairt," she said. "They was a policeman here. He says we can't stay here. I was scairt he talked to you. I was scairt you'd hit him if he talked to you."

Tom said, "What'd I go an' hit a policeman for?"

Ma smiled. “Well—he talked so bad—I nearly hit him myself.”

Tom grabbed her arm and shook her roughly and loosely, and he laughed. He sat down on the ground, still laughing. “My God, Ma. I knowed you when you was gentle. What’s come over you?”

She looked serious. “I don’ know, Tom.”

“Fust you stan’ us off with a jack handle, and now you try to hit a cop.” He laughed softly, and he reached out and patted her bare foot tenderly. “A ol’ hell-cat,” he said.

“Tom.”

“Yeah?”

She hesitated a long time. “Tom, this here policeman—he called us—Okies. He says, ‘We don’ want you goddamn Okies settlin’ down.’”

Tom studied her, and his hand still rested gently on her bare foot. “Fella tol’ about that,” he said. “Fella tol’ how they say it.” He considered, “Ma, would you say I was a bad fella? Oughta be locked up—like that?”

“No,” she said. “You been tried—No. What you ast me for?”

“Well, I dunno. I’d a took a sock at that cop.”

Ma smiled with amusement. “Maybe I oughta ast you that, ’cause I nearly hit ’im with a skillet.”

“Ma, why’d he say we couldn’ stop here?”

“Jus’ says they don’ want no damn Okies settlin’ down. Says he’s gonna run us in if we’re here tomorra.”

“But we ain’t use’ ta gettin’ shoved aroun’ by no cops.”

“I tol’ him that,” said Ma. “He says we ain’t home now. We’re in California, and they do what they want.”

Tom said uneasily, “Ma, I got somepin to tell ya. Noah—he went on down the river. He ain’t a-goin’ on.”

It took a moment for Ma to understand. “Why?” she asked softly.

“I don’ know. Says he got to. Says he got to stay. Says for me to tell you.”

“How’ll he eat?” she demanded.

“I don’ know. Says he’ll catch fish.”

Ma was silent a long time. “Family’s fallin’ apart,” she said. “I don’ know. Seems like I can’t think no more. I jus’ can’t think. They’s too much.”

Tom said lamely, “He’ll be awright, Ma. He’s a funny kind a fella.”

Ma turned stunned eyes toward the river. “I jus’ can’t seem to think no more.”

Tom looked down the line of tents and he saw Ruthie and Winfield standing in front of a tent in decorous conversation with someone inside. Ruthie was twisting her skirt in her hands, while Winfield dug a hole in the ground with his toe. Tom called, “You, Ruthie!” She looked up and saw him and trotted toward him, with Winfield behind her. When she came up, Tom said, “You go get our folks. They’re sleepin’ down the willows. Get ’em. An’ you, Winfiel’. You tell the Wilsons we’re gonna get rollin’ soon as we can.” The children spun around and charged off.

Tom said, “Ma, how’s Granma now?”

“Well, she got a sleep today. Maybe she’s better. She’s still a-sleepin’.”

“Tha’s good. How much pork we got?”

“Not very much. Quarter hog.”

“Well, we got to fill that other kag with water. Got to take water along.” They could hear Ruthie’s shrill cries for the men down in the willows.

Ma shoved willow sticks into the fire and made it crackle up about the black pot. She said, “I pray God we gonna get some res’. I pray Jesus we gonna lay down in a nice place.”

The sun sank toward the baked and broken hills to the west. The pot over the fire bubbled furiously. Ma went under the tarpaulin and came out with an apronful of potatoes, and she dropped them into the boiling water. “I pray God we gonna be let to wash some clothes. We ain’t never been dirty like this. Don’t even wash potatoes ’fore we boil ’em. I wonder why? Seems like the heart’s took out of us.”

The men came trooping up from the willows, and their eyes were full of sleep, and their faces were red and puffed with daytime sleep.

Pa said, “What’s a matter?”

“We’re goin’,” said Tom. “Cop says we got to go. Might’s well get her over. Get a good start an’ maybe we’ll be through her. Near three hunderd miles where we’re goin’.”

Pa said, “I thought we was gonna get a rest.”

“Well, we ain’t. We got to go. Pa,” Tom said, “Noah ain’t a-goin’. He walked on down the river.”

“Ain’t goin’? What the hell’s the matter with him?” And then Pa caught himself. “My fault,” he said miserably. “That boy’s all my fault.”

“No.”

“I don’t wanta talk about it no more,” said Pa. “I can’t—my fault.”

“Well, we got to go,” said Tom.

Wilson walked near for the last words. “We can’t go, folks,” he said. “Sairy’s done up. She got to res’. She ain’t gonna git acrost that desert alive.”

They were silent at his words; then Tom said, “Cop says he’ll run us in if we’re here tomorra.”

Wilson shook his head. His eyes were glazed with worry, and a paleness showed through his dark skin. “Jus’ hafta do ’er, then. Sairy can’t go. If they jail us, why, they’ll hafta jail us. She got to res’ an’ get strong.”

Pa said, “Maybe we better wait an’ all go together.”

“No,” Wilson said. “You been nice to us; you been kin’, but you can’t stay here. You got to get on an’ get jobs and work. We ain’t gonna let you stay.”

Pa said excitedly, “But you ain’t got nothing.”

Wilson smiled. “Never had nothin’ when you took us up. This ain’t none of your business. Don’t you make me git mean. You got to go, or I’ll get mean an’ mad.”

Ma beckoned Pa into the cover of the tarpaulin and spoke softly to him.

Wilson turned to Casy. “Sairy wants you should go see her.”

“Sure,” said the preacher. He walked to the Wilson tent, tiny and gray, and he slipped the flaps aside and entered. It was dusky and hot inside. The mattress lay on the ground, and the equipment was scattered about, as it had been unloaded in the morning. Sairy lay on the mattress, her eyes wide and bright. He stood and looked down at her, his large head bent and the stringy muscles of his neck tight along the sides. And he took off his hat and held it in his hand.

She said, “Did my man tell ya we couldn’ go on?”

“Tha’s what he said.”

Her low, beautiful voice went on, “I wanted us to go. I knowed I wouldn’ live to the other side, but he’d be acrost anyways. But he won’t go. He don’ know. He thinks it’s gonna be all right. He don’ know.”

“He says he won’t go.”

“I know,” she said. “An’ he’s stubborn. I ast you to come to say a prayer.”

“I ain’t a preacher,” he said softly. “My prayers ain’t no good.”

She moistened her lips. “I was there when the ol’ man died. You said one then.”

“It wasn’t no prayer.”

“It was a prayer,” she said.

“It wasn’t no preacher’s prayer.”

“It was a good prayer. I want you should say one for me.”

“I don’ know what to say.”

She closed her eyes for a minute and then opened them again. “Then say one to yourself. Don’t use no words to it. That’d be awright.”

“I got no God,” he said.

“You got a God. Don’t make no difference if you don’ know what he looks like.” The preacher bowed his head. She watched him apprehensively. And when he raised his head again she looked relieved. “That’s good,” she said. “That’s what I needed. Somebody close enough—to pray.”

He shook his head as though to awaken himself. “I don’ understan’ this here,” he said.

And she replied, “Yes—you know, don’t you?”

“I know,” he said, “I know, but I don’t understan’. Maybe you’ll res’ a few days an’ then come on.”

She shook her head slowly from side to side. “I’m jus’ pain covered with skin. I know what it is, but I won’t tell him. He’d be too sad. He wouldn’ know what to do anyways. Maybe in the night, when he’s a-sleepin’—when he waked up, it won’t be so bad.”

“You want I should stay with you an’ not go on?”

“No,” she said. “No. When I was a little girl I use’ ta sing. Folks

roun' about use' ta say I sung as nice as Jenny Lind. Folks use' ta come an' listen when I sung. An'—when they stood—an' me a-singin', why, me an' them was together more'n you could ever know. I was thankful. There ain't so many folks can feel so full up, so close, an' them folks standin' there an' me a-singin'. Thought maybe I'd sing in theaters, but I never done it. An' I'm glad. They wasn't nothin' got in between me an' them. An'—that's why I wanted you to pray. I wanted to feel that clostness, oncet more. It's the same thing, singin' an' prayin', jus' the same thing. I wisht you could a-heerd me sing."

He looked down at her, into her eyes. "Good-by," he said.

She shook her head slowly back and forth and closed her lips tight. And the preacher went out of the dusky tent into the blinding light.

The men were loading up the truck, Uncle John on top, while the others passed equipment up to him. He stowed it carefully, keeping the surface level. Ma emptied the quarter of a keg of salt pork into a pan, and Tom and Al took both little barrels to the river and washed them. They tied them to the running boards and carried water in buckets to fill them. Then over the tops they tied canvas to keep them from slopping the water out. Only the tarpaulin and Granma's mattress were left to be put on.

Tom said, "With the load we'll take, this ol' wagon'll boil her head off. We got to have plenty water."

Ma passed the boiled potatoes out and brought the half sack from the tent and put it with the pan of pork. The family ate standing, shuffling their feet and tossing the hot potatoes from hand to hand until they cooled.

Ma went to the Wilson tent and stayed for ten minutes, and then she came out quietly. "It's time to go," she said.

The men went under the tarpaulin. Granma still slept, her mouth wide open. They lifted the whole mattress gently and passed it up on top of the truck. Granma drew up her skinny legs and frowned in her sleep, but she did not awaken.

Uncle John and Pa tied the tarpaulin over the cross-piece, making a little tight tent on top of the load. They lashed it down to the side-bars. And then they were ready. Pa took out his purse and dug two crushed bills from it. He went to Wilson and held them out. "We want you should take this, an"'—he pointed to the pork and

potatoes—“an’ that.”

Wilson hung his head and shook it sharply. “I ain’t a-gonna do it,” he said. “You ain’t got much.”

“Got enough to get there,” said Pa. “We ain’t left it all. We’ll have work right off.”

“I ain’t a-gonna do it,” Wilson said. “I’ll git mean if you try.”

Ma took the two bills from Pa’s hand. She folded them neatly and put them on the ground and placed the pork pan over them. “That’s where they’ll be,” she said. “If you don’ get ’em, somebody else will.” Wilson, his head still down, turned and went to his tent; he stepped inside and the flaps fell behind him.

For a few moments the family waited, and then, “We got to go,” said Tom. “It’s near four, I bet.”

The family climbed on the truck, Ma on top, beside Granma. Tom and Al and Pa in the seat, and Winfield on Pa’s lap. Connie and Rose of Sharon made a nest against the cab. The preacher and Uncle John and Ruthie were in a tangle on the load.

Pa called, “Good-by, Mister and Mis’ Wilson.” There was no answer from the tent. Tom started the engine and the truck lumbered away. And as they crawled up the rough road toward Needles and the highway, Ma looked back. Wilson stood in front of his tent, staring after them, and his hat was in his hand. The sun fell full on his face. Ma waved her hand at him, but he did not respond.

Tom kept the truck in second gear over the rough road, to protect the springs. At Needles he drove into a service station, checked the worn tires for air, checked the spares tied to the back. He had the gas tank filled, and he bought two five-gallon cans of gasoline and a two-gallon can of oil. He filled the radiator, begged a map, and studied it.

The service-station boy, in his white uniform, seemed uneasy until the bill was paid. He said, “You people sure have got nerve.”

Tom looked up from the map. “What you mean?”

“Well, crossin’ in a jalopy like this.”

“You been acrost?”

“Sure, plenty, but not in no wreck like this.”

Tom said, “If we broke down maybe somebody’d give us a han’.”

“Well, maybe. But folks are kind of scared to stop at night. I’d

hate to be doing it. Takes more nerve than I've got."

Tom grinned. "It don't take no nerve to do somepin when there ain't nothin' else you can do. Well, thanks. We'll drag on." And he got in the truck and moved away.

The boy in white went into the iron building where his helper labored over a book of bills. "Jesus, what a hard-looking outfit!"

"Them Okies? They're all hard-lookin'."

"Jesus, I'd hate to start out in a jalopy like that."

"Well, you and me got sense. Them goddamn Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain't human. A human being wouldn't live like they do. A human being couldn't stand it to be so dirty and miserable. They ain't a hell of a lot better than gorillas."

"Just the same I'm glad I ain't crossing the desert in no Hudson Super-Six. She sounds like a threshing machine."

The other boy looked down at his book of bills. And a big drop of sweat rolled down his finger and fell on the pink bills. "You know, they don't have much trouble. They're so goddamn dumb they don't know it's dangerous. And, Christ Almighty, they don't know any better than what they got. Why worry?"

"I'm not worrying. Just thought if it was me, I wouldn't like it."

"That's 'cause you know better. They don't know any better." And he wiped the sweat from the pink bill with his sleeve.

The truck took the road and moved up the long hill, through the broken, rotten rock. The engine boiled very soon and Tom slowed down and took it easy. Up the long slope, winding and twisting through dead country, burned white and gray, and no hint of life in it. Once Tom stopped for a few moments to let the engine cool, and then he traveled on. They topped the pass while the sun was still up, and looked down on the desert—black cinder mountains in the distance, and the yellow sun reflected on the gray desert. The little starved bushes, sage and greasewood, threw bold shadows on the sand and bits of rock. The glaring sun was straight ahead. Tom held his hand before his eyes to see at all. They passed the crest and coasted down to cool the engine. They coasted down the long sweep to the floor of the desert, and the fan turned over to cool the water in the radiator. In the driver's seat, Tom and Al and Pa, and Winfield on Pa's knee, looked into the bright descending sun, and

their eyes were stony, and their brown faces were damp with perspiration. The burnt land and the black, cindery hills broke the even distance and made it terrible in the reddening light of the setting sun.

Al said, “Jesus, what a place. How’d you like to walk acrost her?”

“People done it,” said Tom. “Lots a people done it; an’ if they could, we could.”

“Lots must a died,” said Al.

“Well, we ain’t come out exac’ly clean.”

Al was silent for a while, and the reddening desert swept past. “Think we’ll ever see them Wilsons again?” Al asked.

Tom flicked his eyes down to the oil gauge. “I got a hunch nobody ain’t gonna see Mis’ Wilson for long. Jus’ a hunch I got.”

Winfield said, “Pa, I wanta get out.”

Tom looked over at him. “Might’s well let ever’body out ’fore we settle down to drivin’ tonight.” He slowed the car and brought it to a stop. Winfield scrambled out and urinated at the side of the road. Tom leaned out. “Anybody else?”

“We’re holdin’ our water up here,” Uncle John called.

Pa said, “Winfiel’, you crawl up on top. You put my legs to sleep a-settin’ on ’em.” The little boy buttoned his overalls and obediently crawled up the back board and on his hands and knees crawled over Granma’s mattress and forward to Ruthie.

The truck moved on into the evening, and the edge of the sun struck the rough horizon and turned the desert red.

Ruthie said, “Wouldn’ leave you set up there, huh?”

“I didn’ want to. It wasn’t so nice as here. Couldn’ lie down.”

“Well, don’ you bother me, a-squawkin’ an’ a-talkin’,” Ruthie said, “’cause I’m goin’ to sleep, an’ when I wake up, we gonna be there! ’Cause Tom said so! Gonna seem funny to see pretty country.”

The sun went down and left a great halo in the sky. And it grew very dark under the tarpaulin, a long cave with light at each end—a flat triangle of light.

Connie and Rose of Sharon leaned back against the cab, and the hot wind tumbling through the tent struck the backs of their heads, and the tarpaulin whipped and drummed above them. They spoke

together in low tones, pitched to the drumming canvas, so that no one could hear them. When Connie spoke he turned his head and spoke into her ear, and she did the same to him. She said, “Seems like we wasn’t never gonna do nothin’ but move. I’m so tar’d.”

He turned his head to her ear. “Maybe in the mornin’. How’d you like to be alone now?” In the dusk his hand moved out and stroked her hip.

She said, “Don’t. You’ll make me crazy as a loon. Don’t do that.” And she turned her head to hear his response.

“Maybe—when ever’body’s asleep.”

“Maybe,” she said. “But wait till they get to sleep. You’ll make me crazy, an’ maybe they won’t get to sleep.”

“I can’t hardly stop,” he said.

“I know. Me neither. Le’s talk about when we get there; an’ you move away ’fore I get crazy.”

He shifted away a little. “Well, I’ll get to studyin’ nights right off,” he said. She sighed deeply. “Gonna get one a them books that tells about it an’ cut the coupon, right off.”

“How long, you think?” she asked.

“How long what?”

“How long ’fore you’ll be makin’ big money an’ we got ice?”

“Can’t tell,” he said importantly. “Can’t really rightly tell. Fella oughta be studied up pretty good ’fore Christmus.”

“Soon’s you get studied up we could get ice an’ stuff, I guess.”

He chuckled. “It’s this here heat,” he said. “What you gonna need ice roun’ Christmus for?”

She giggled. “Tha’s right. But I’d like ice any time. Now don’t. You’ll get me crazy!”

The dusk passed into dark and the desert stars came out in the soft sky, stars stabbing and sharp, with few points and rays to them, and the sky was velvet. And the heat changed. While the sun was up, it was a beating, flailing heat, but now the heat came from below, from the earth itself, and the heat was thick and muffling. The lights of the truck came on, and they illuminated a little blur of highway ahead, and a strip of desert on either side of the road. And sometimes eyes gleamed in the lights far ahead, but no animal showed in the lights. It was pitch dark under the canvas now. Uncle

John and the preacher were curled in the middle of the truck, resting on their elbows, and staring out the back triangle. They could see the two bumps that were Ma and Granma against the outside. They could see Ma move occasionally, and her dark arm moving against the outside.

Uncle John talked to the preacher. “Casy,” he said, “you’re a fella oughta know what to do.”

“What to do about what?”

“I dunno,” said Uncle John.

Casy said, “Well, that’s gonna make it easy for me!”

“Well, you been a preacher.”

“Look, John, ever’body takes a crack at me ’cause I been a preacher. A preacher ain’t nothin’ but a man.”

“Yeah, but—he’s—a *kind* of a man, else he wouldn’ be a preacher. I wanna ast you—well, you think a fella could bring bad luck to folks?”

“I dunno,” said Casy. “I dunno.”

“Well—see—I was married—fine, good girl. An’ one night she got a pain in her stomach. An’ she says, ‘You better get a doctor.’ An’ I says, ‘Hell, you jus’ et too much.’” Uncle John put his hand on Casy’s knee and he peered through the darkness at him. “She give me a *look*. An’ she groaned all night, an’ she died the next afternoon.” The preacher mumbled something. “You see,” John went on, “I kil’t her. An’ sence then I tried to make it up—mos’ly to kids. An’ I tried to be good, an’ I can’t. I get drunk, an’ I go wild.”

“Ever’body goes wild,” said Casy. “I do too.”

“Yeah, but you ain’t got a sin on your soul like me.”

Casy said gently, “Sure I got sins. Ever’body got sins. A sin is somepin you ain’t sure about. Them people that’s sure about ever’thing an’ ain’t got no sin—well, with that kind a son-of-a-bitch, if I was God I’d kick their ass right outa heaven! I couldn’ stand ’em!”

Uncle John said, “I got a feelin’ I’m bringin’ bad luck to my own folks. I got a feelin’ I oughta go away an’ let ’em be. I ain’t comf ’table bein’ like this.”

Casy said quickly, “I know this—a man got to do what he got to do. I can’t tell you. I can’t tell you. I don’t think they’s luck or bad luck. On’y one thing in this worl’ I’m sure of, an’ that’s I’m sure

nobody got a right to mess with a fella's life. He got to do it all hisself. Help him, maybe, but not tell him what to do."

Uncle John said disappointedly, "Then you don' know?"

"I don' know."

"You think it was a sin to let my wife die like that?"

"Well," said Casy, "for anybody else it was a mistake, but if you think it was a sin—then it's a sin. A fella builds his own sins right up from the groun'."

"I got to give that a goin'-over," said Uncle John, and he rolled on his back and lay with his knees pulled up.

The truck moved on over the hot earth, and the hours passed. Ruthie and Winfield went to sleep. Connie loosened a blanket from the load and covered himself and Rose of Sharon with it, and in the heat they struggled together, and held their breaths. And after a time Connie threw off the blanket and the hot tunneling wind felt cool on their wet bodies.

On the back of the truck Ma lay on the mattress beside Granma, and she could not see with her eyes, but she could feel the struggling body and the struggling heart; and the sobbing breath was in her ear. And Ma said over and over, "All right. It's gonna be all right." And she said hoarsely, "You know the family got to get acrost. You know that."

Uncle John called, "You all right?"

It was a moment before she answered. "All right. Guess I dropped off to sleep." And after a time Granma was still, and Ma lay rigid beside her.

The night hours passed, and the dark was in against the truck. Sometimes cars passed them, going west and away; and sometimes great trucks came up out of the west and rumbled eastward. And the stars flowed down in a slow cascade over the western horizon. It was near midnight when they neared Daggett, where the inspection station is. The road was floodlighted there, and a sign illuminated, "KEEP RIGHT AND STOP." The officers loafed in the office, but they came out and stood under the long covered shed when Tom pulled in. One officer put down the license number and raised the hood.

Tom asked, "What's this here?"

"Agricultural inspection. We got to look over your stuff. Got any

vegetables or seeds?"

"No," said Tom.

"Well, we got to look over your stuff. You got to unload."

Now Ma climbed heavily down from the truck. Her face was swollen and her eyes were hard. "Look, mister. We got a sick ol' lady. We got to get her to a doctor. We can't wait." She seemed to fight with hysteria. "You can't make us wait."

"Yeah? Well, we got to look you over."

"I swear we ain't got any thing!" Ma cried. "I swear it. An' Granma's awful sick."

"You don't look so good yourself," the officer said.

Ma pulled herself up the back of the truck, hoisted herself with huge strength. "Look," she said.

The officer shot a flashlight beam up on the old shrunken face. "By God, she is," he said. "You swear you got no seeds or fruits or vegetables, no corn, no oranges?"

"No, no. I swear it!"

"Then go ahead. You can get a doctor in Barstow. That's only eight miles. Go on ahead."

Tom climbed in and drove on.

The officer turned to his companion. "I couldn' hold 'em."

"Maybe it was a bluff," said the other.

"Oh, Jesus, no! You should of seen that ol' woman's face. That wasn't no bluff."

Tom increased his speed to Barstow, and in the little town he stopped, got out, and walked around the truck. Ma leaned out. "It's awright," she said. "I didn' wanta stop there, fear we wouldn' get acrost."

"Yeah! But how's Granma?"

"She's awright—awright. Drive on. We got to get acrost." Tom shook his head and walked back.

"Al," he said, "I'm gonna fill her up, an' then you drive some." He pulled to an all-night gas station and filled the tank and the radiator, and filled the crank case. Then Al slipped under the wheel and Tom took the outside, with Pa in the middle. They drove away into the darkness and the little hills near Barstow were behind them.

Tom said, “I don’ know what’s got into Ma. She’s flighty as a dog with a flea in his ear. Wouldn’ a took long to look over the stuff. An’ she says Granma’s sick; an’ now she says Granma’s awright. I can’t figger her out. She ain’t right. S’pose she wore her brains out on the trip.”

Pa said, “Ma’s almost like she was when she was a girl. She was a wild one then. She wasn’ scairt of nothin’. I thought havin’ all the kids an’ workin’ took it out a her, but I guess it ain’t. Christ! When she got that jack handle back there, I tell you I wouldn’ wanna be the fella took it away from her.”

“I dunno what’s got into her,” Tom said. “Maybe she’s jus’ tar’d out.”

Al said, “I won’t be doin’ no weepin’ an’ a-moanin’ to get through. I got this goddamn car on my soul.”

Tom said, “Well, you done a damn good job a pickin’. We ain’t had hardly no trouble with her at all.”

All night they bored through the hot darkness, and jack-rabbits scuttled into the lights and dashed away in long jolting leaps. And the dawn came up behind them when the lights of Mojave were ahead. And the dawn showed high mountains to the west. They filled with water and oil at Mojave and crawled into the mountains, and the dawn was about them.

Tom said, “Jesus, the desert’s past! Pa, Al, for Christ sakes! The desert’s past!”

“I’m too goddamn tired to care,” said Al.

“Want me to drive?”

“No, wait awhile.”

They drove through Tehachapi in the morning glow, and the sun came up behind them, and then—suddenly they saw the great valley below them. Al jammed on the brake and stopped in the middle of the road, and, “Jesus Christ! Look!” he said. The vineyards, the orchards, the great flat valley, green and beautiful, the trees set in rows, and the farm houses.

And Pa said, “God Almighty!” The distant cities, the little towns in the orchard land, and the morning sun, golden on the valley. A car honked behind them. Al pulled to the side of the road and parked.

“I want ta look at her.” The grain fields golden in the morning,

and the willow lines, the eucalyptus trees in rows.

Pa sighed, “I never knowed they was anything like her.” The peach trees and the walnut groves, and the dark green patches of oranges. And red roofs among the trees, and barns—rich barns. Al got out and stretched his legs.

He called, “Ma—come look. We’re there!”

Ruthie and Winfield scrambled down from the car, and then they stood, silent and awestruck, embarrassed before the great valley. The distance was thinned with haze, and the land grew softer and softer in the distance. A windmill flashed in the sun, and its turning blades were like a little heliograph, far away. Ruthie and Winfield looked at it, and Ruthie whispered, “It’s California.”

Winfield moved his lips silently over the syllables. “There’s fruit,” he said aloud.

Casy and Uncle John, Connie and Rose of Sharon climbed down. And they stood silently. Rose of Sharon had started to brush her hair back, when she caught sight of the valley and her hand dropped slowly to her side.

Tom said, “Where’s Ma? I want Ma to see it. Look, Ma! Come here, Ma.” Ma was climbing slowly, stiffly, down the back board. Tom looked at her. “My God, Ma, you sick?” Her face was stiff and putty-like, and her eyes seemed to have sunk deep into her head, and the rims were red with weariness. Her feet touched the ground and she braced herself by holding the truck-side.

Her voice was a croak. “Ya say we’re acrost?”

Tom pointed to the great valley. “Look!”

She turned her head, and her mouth opened a little. Her fingers went to her throat and gathered a little pinch of skin and twisted gently. “Thank God!” she said. “The fambly’s here.” Her knees buckled and she sat down on the running board.

“You sick, Ma?”

“No, jus’ tar’d.”

“Didn’ you get no sleep?”

“No.”

“Was Granma bad?”

Ma looked down at her hands, lying together like tired lovers in her lap. “I wisht I could wait an’ not tell you. I wisht it could be all

—nice."

Pa said, "Then Granma's bad."

Ma raised her eyes and looked over the valley. "Granma's dead."

They looked at her, all of them, and Pa asked, "When?"

"Before they stopped us las' night."

"So that's why you didn' want 'em to look."

"I was afraid we wouldn' get acrost," she said. "I tol' Granma we couldn' he'p her. The fambly had ta get acrost. I tol' her, tol' her when she was a-dyin'. We couldn' stop in the desert. There was the young ones—an' Rosasharn's baby. I tol' her." She put up her hands and covered her face for a moment. "She can get buried in a nice green place," Ma said softly. "Trees aroun' an' a nice place. She got to lay her head down in California."

The family looked at Ma with a little terror at her strength.

Tom said, "Jesus Christ! You layin' there with her all night long!"

"The fambly hadda get acrost," Ma said miserably.

Tom moved close to put his hand on her shoulder.

"Don' touch me," she said. "I'll hol' up if you don' touch me. That'd get me."

Pa said, "We got to go on now. We got to go on down."

Ma looked up at him. "Can—can I set up front? I don' wanna go back there no more—I'm tar'd. I'm awful tar'd."

They climbed back on the load, and they avoided the long stiff figure covered and tucked in a comforter, even the head covered and tucked. They moved to their places and tried to keep their eyes from it—from the hump on the comfort that would be the nose, and the steep cliff that would be the jut of the chin. They tried to keep their eyes away, and they could not. Ruthie and Winfield, crowded in a forward corner as far away from the body as they could get, stared at the tucked figure.

And Ruthie whispered, "Tha's Granma, an' she's dead."

Winfield nodded solemnly. "She ain't breathin' at all. She's awful dead."

And Rose of Sharon said softly to Connie, "She was a-dyin' right when we——"

"How'd we know?" he reassured her.

Al climbed on the load to make room for Ma in the seat. And Al

swaggered a little because he was sorry. He plumped down beside Casy and Uncle John. “Well, she was ol’. Guess her time was up,” Al said. “Ever’body got to die.” Casy and Uncle John turned eyes expressionlessly on him and looked at him as though he were a curious talking bush. “Well, ain’t they?” he demanded. And the eyes looked away, leaving Al sullen and shaken.

Casy said in wonder, “All night long, an’ she was alone.” And he said, “John, there’s a woman so great with love—she scares me. Makes me afraid an’ mean.”

John asked, “Was it a sin? Is they any part of it you might call a sin?”

Casy turned on him in astonishment, “A sin? No, there ain’t no part of it that’s a sin.”

“I ain’t never done nothin’ that wasn’t part sin,” said John, and he looked at the long wrapped body.

Tom and Ma and Pa got into the front seat. Tom let the truck roll and started on compression. And the heavy truck moved, snorting and jerking and popping down the hill. The sun was behind them, and the valley golden and green before them. Ma shook her head slowly from side to side. “It’s purty,” she said. “I wisht they could of saw it.”

“I wisht so too,” said Pa.

Tom patted the steering wheel under his hand. “They was too old,” he said. “They wouldn’t of saw nothin’ that’s here. Grampa would a been a-seein’ the Injuns an’ the prairie country when he was a young fella. An’ Granma would a remembered an’ seen the first home she lived in. They was too ol’. Who’s really seein’ it is Ruthie an’ Winfiel’.”

Pa said, “Here’s Tommy talkin’ like a growed-up man, talkin’ like a preacher almos’.”

And Ma smiled sadly. “He is. Tommy’s growed way up—way up so I can’t get aholt of ’im sometimes.”

They popped down the mountain, twisting and looping, losing the valley sometimes, and then finding it again. And the hot breath of the valley came up to them, with hot green smells on it, and with resinous sage and tarweed smells. The crickets crackled along the road. A rattlesnake crawled across the road and Tom hit it and broke it and left it squirming.

Tom said, “I guess we got to go to the coroner, wherever he is. We got to get her buried decent. How much money might be lef’, Pa?”

“’Bout forty dollars,” said Pa.

Tom laughed. “Jesus, are we gonna start clean! We sure ain’t bringin’ nothin’ with us.” He chuckled a moment, and then his face straightened quickly. He pulled the visor of his cap down low over his eyes. And the truck rolled down the mountain into the great valley.

Chapter 19

Once California belonged to Mexico and its land to Mexicans; and a horde of tattered feverish Americans poured in. And such was their hunger for land that they took the land—stole Sutter's land, Guerrero's land, took the grants and broke them up and growled and quarreled over them, those frantic hungry men; and they guarded with guns the land they had stolen. They put up houses and barns, they turned the earth and planted crops. And these things were possession, and possession was ownership.

The Mexicans were weak and fed. They could not resist, because they wanted nothing in the world as frantically as the Americans wanted land.

Then, with time, the squatters were no longer squatters, but owners; and their children grew up and had children on the land. And the hunger was gone from them, the feral hunger, the gnawing, tearing hunger for land, for water and earth and the good sky over it, for the green thrusting grass, for the swelling roots. They had these things so completely that they did not know about them any more. They had no more the stomach-tearing lust for a rich acre and a shining blade to plow it, for seed and a windmill beating its wings in the air. They arose in the dark no more to hear the sleepy birds' first chittering, and the morning wind around the house while they waited for the first light to go out to the dear acres. These things were lost, and crops were reckoned in dollars, and land was valued by principal plus interest, and crops were bought and sold before they were planted. Then crop failure, drought, and flood were no longer little deaths within life, but simple losses of money. And all their love was thinned with money, and all their fierceness dribbled away in interest until they were no longer farmers at all, but little shopkeepers of crops, little manufacturers who must sell before they can make. Then those farmers who were not good shopkeepers lost their land to good shopkeepers. No matter how clever, how loving a man might be with earth and growing things, he could not survive if he were not also a good shopkeeper. And as time went on, the business men had the farms, and the farms grew larger, but there were fewer of them.

Now farming became industry, and the owners followed Rome,

although they did not know it. They imported slaves, although they did not call them slaves: Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Filipinos. They live on rice and beans, the business men said. They don't need much. They wouldn't know what to do with good wages. Why, look how they live. Why, look what they eat. And if they get funny—deport them.

And all the time the farms grew larger and the owners fewer. And there were pitifully few farmers on the land any more. And the imported serfs were beaten and frightened and starved until some went home again, and some grew fierce and were killed or driven from the country. And the farms grew larger and the owners fewer.

And the crops changed. Fruit trees took the place of grain fields, and vegetables to feed the world spread out on the bottoms: lettuce, cauliflower, artichokes, potatoes—stoop crops. A man may stand to use a scythe, a plow, a pitchfork; but he must crawl like a bug between the rows of lettuce, he must bend his back and pull his long bag between the cotton rows, he must go on his knees like a penitent across a cauliflower patch.

And it came about that owners no longer worked on their farms. They farmed on paper; and they forgot the land, the smell, the feel of it, and remembered only that they owned it, remembered only what they gained and lost by it. And some of the farms grew so large that one man could not even conceive of them any more, so large that it took batteries of bookkeepers to keep track of interest and gain and loss; chemists to test the soil, to replenish; straw bosses to see that the stooping men were moving along the rows as swiftly as the material of their bodies could stand. Then such a farmer really became a storekeeper, and kept a store. He paid the men, and sold them food, and took the money back. And after a while he did not pay the men at all, and saved bookkeeping. These farms gave food on credit. A man might work and feed himself; and when the work was done, he might find that he owed money to the company. And the owners not only did not work the farms any more, many of them had never seen the farms they owned.

And then the dispossessed were drawn west—from Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico; from Nevada and Arkansas families, tribes, dusted out, tractored out. Carloads, caravans, homeless and hungry; twenty thousand and fifty thousand and a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand. They streamed over the

mountains, hungry and restless—restless as ants, scurrying to find work to do—to lift, to push, to pull, to pick, to cut—anything, any burden to bear, for food. The kids are hungry. We got no place to live. Like ants scurrying for work, for food, and most of all for land.

We ain't foreign. Seven generations back Americans, and beyond that Irish, Scotch, English, German. One of our folks in the Revolution, an' they was lots of our folks in the Civil War—both sides. Americans.

They were hungry, and they were fierce. And they had hoped to find a home, and they found only hatred. Okies—the owners hated them because the owners knew they were soft and the Okies strong, that they were fed and the Okies hungry; and perhaps the owners had heard from their grandfathers how easy it is to steal land from a soft man if you are fierce and hungry and armed. The owners hated them. And in the towns, the storekeepers hated them because they had no money to spend. There is no shorter path to a storekeeper's contempt, and all his admirations are exactly opposite. The town men, little bankers, hated Okies because there was nothing to gain from them. They had nothing. And the laboring people hated Okies because a hungry man must work, and if he must work, if he has to work, the wage payer automatically gives him less for his work; and then no one can get more.

And the dispossessed, the migrants, flowed into California, two hundred and fifty thousand, and three hundred thousand. Behind them new tractors were going on the land and the tenants were being forced off. And new waves were on the way, new waves of the dispossessed and the homeless, hardened, intent, and dangerous.

And while the Californians wanted many things, accumulation, social success, amusement, luxury, and a curious banking security, the new barbarians wanted only two things—land and food; and to them the two were one. And whereas the wants of the Californians were nebulous and undefined, the wants of the Okies were beside the roads, lying there to be seen and coveted: the good fields with water to be dug for, the good green fields, earth to crumble experimentally in the hand, grass to smell, oaten stalks to chew until the sharp sweetness was in the throat. A man might look at a fallow field and know, and see in his mind that his own bending back and his own straining arms would bring the cabbages into the

light, and the golden eating corn, the turnips and carrots.

And a homeless hungry man, driving the roads with his wife beside him and his thin children in the back seat, could look at the fallow fields which might produce food but not profit, and that man could know how a fallow field is a sin and the unused land a crime against the thin children. And such a man drove along the roads and knew temptation at every field, and knew the lust to take these fields and make them grow strength for his children and a little comfort for his wife. The temptation was before him always. The fields goaded him, and the company ditches with good water flowing were a goad to him.

And in the south he saw the golden oranges hanging on the trees, the little golden oranges on the dark green trees; and guards with shotguns patrolling the lines so a man might not pick an orange for a thin child, oranges to be dumped if the price was low.

He drove his old car into a town. He scoured the farms for work. Where can we sleep the night?

Well, there's Hooverville on the edge of the river. There's a whole raft of Okies there.

He drove his old car to Hooverville. He never asked again, for there was a Hooverville on the edge of every town.

The rag town lay close to water; and the houses were tents, and weed-thatched enclosures, paper houses, a great junk pile. The man drove his family in and became a citizen of Hooverville—always they were called Hooverville. The man put up his own tent as near to water as he could get; or if he had no tent, he went to the city dump and brought back cartons and built a house of corrugated paper. And when the rains came the house melted and washed away. He settled in Hooverville and he scoured the countryside for work, and the little money he had went for gasoline to look for work. In the evening the men gathered and talked together. Squatting on their hams they talked of the land they had seen.

There's thirty thousan' acres, out west of here. Layin' there. Jesus, what I could do with that, with five acres of that! Why, hell, I'd have ever'thing to eat.

Notice one thing? They ain't no vegetables nor chickens nor pigs at the farms. They raise one thing—cotton, say, or peaches, or lettuce. 'Nother place'll be all chickens. They buy the stuff they could raise in the dooryard.

Jesus, what I could do with a couple pigs!

Well, it ain't yourn, an' it ain't gonna be yourn.

What we gonna do? The kids can't grow up this way.

In the camps the word would come whispering, There's work at Shafter. And the cars would be loaded in the night, the highways crowded—a gold rush for work. At Shafter the people would pile up, five times too many to do the work. A gold rush for work. They stole away in the night, frantic for work. And along the roads lay the temptations, the fields that could bear food.

That's owned. That ain't our'n.

Well, maybe we could get a little piece of her. Maybe—a little piece. Right down there—a patch. Jimson weed now. Christ, I could git enough potatoes off'n that little patch to feed my whole family!

It ain't our'n. It got to have Jimson weeds.

Now and then a man tried; crept on the land and cleared a piece, trying like a thief to steal a little richness from the earth. Secret gardens hidden in the weeds. A package of carrot seeds and a few turnips. Planted potato skins, crept out in the evening secretly to hoe in the stolen earth.

Leave the weeds around the edge—then nobody can see what we're a-doin'. Leave some weeds, big tall ones, in the middle.

Secret gardening in the evenings, and water carried in a rusty can.

And then one day a deputy sheriff: Well, what you think you're doin'?

I ain't doin' no harm.

I had my eye on you. This ain't your land. You're trespassing.

The land ain't plowed, an' I ain't hurtin' it none.

You goddamned squatters. Pretty soon you'd think you owned it. You'd be sore as hell. Think you owned it. Get off now.

And the little green carrot tops were kicked off and the turnip greens trampled. And then the Jimson weed moved back in. But the cop was right. A crop raised—why, that makes ownership. Land hoed and the carrots eaten—a man might fight for land he's taken food from. Get him off quick! He'll think he owns it. He might even die fighting for the little plot among the Jimson weeds.

Did ya see his face when we kicked them turnips out? Why, he'd

kill a fella soon's he'd look at him. We got to keep these here people down or they'll take the country. They'll take the country.

Outlanders, foreigners.

Sure, they talk the same language, but they ain't the same. Look how they live. Think any of us folks'd live like that? Hell, no!

In the evenings, squatting and talking. And an excited man: Whyn't twenty of us take a piece of lan'? We got guns. Take it an' say, "Put us off if you can." Whyn't we do that?

They'd jus' shoot us like rats.

Well, which'd you ruther be, dead or here? Under groun' or in a house all made of gunny sacks? Which'd you ruther for your kids, dead now or dead in two years with what they call malnutrition? Know what we et all week? Biled nettles an' fried dough! Know where we got the flour for the dough? Swep' the floor of a boxcar.

Talking in the camps, and the deputies, fat-assed men with guns slung on fat hips, swaggering through the camps: Give 'em somepin to think about. Got to keep 'em in line or Christ only knows what they'll do! Why, Jesus, they're as dangerous as niggers in the South! If they ever get together there ain't nothin' that'll stop 'em.

Quote: In Lawrenceville a deputy sheriff evicted a squatter, and the squatter resisted, making it necessary for the officer to use force. The eleven-year-old son of the squatter shot and killed the deputy with a .22 rifle.

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Rattlesnakes! Don't take chances with 'em, an' if they argue, shoot first. If a kid'll kill a cop, what'll the men do? Thing is, get tougher'n they are. Treat 'em rough. Scare 'em.

What if they won't scare? What if they stand up and take it and shoot back? These men were armed when they were children. A gun is an extension of themselves. What if they won't scare? What if some time an army of them marches on the land as the Lombards did in Italy, as the Germans did on Gaul and the Turks did on Byzantium? They were land-hungry, ill-armed hordes too, and the legions could not stop them. Slaughter and terror did not stop them. How can you frighten a man whose hunger is not only in his own cramped stomach but in the wretched bellies of his children? You can't scare him—he has known a fear beyond every other.

In Hooverville the men talking: Grampa took his lan' from the Injuns.

Now, this ain't right. We're a-talkin' here. This here you're talkin' about is stealin'. I ain't no thief.

No? You stole a bottle of milk from a porch night before last. An' you stole some copper wire and sold it for a piece of meat.

Yeah, but the kids was hungry.

It's stealin', though.

Know how the Fairfiel' ranch was got? I'll tell ya. It was all gov'ment lan', an' could be took up. Ol' Fairfiel', he went into San Francisco to the bars, an' he got him three hunderd stew bums. Them bums took up the lan'. Fairfiel' kep' 'em in food an' whisky, an' then when they'd proved the lan', ol' Fairfiel' took it from 'em. He used to say the lan' cost him a pint of rotgut an acre. Would you say that was stealin'?

Well, it wasn't right, but he never went to jail for it.

No, he never went to jail for it. An' the fella that put a boat in a wagon an' made his report like it was all under water 'cause he went in a boat—he never went to jail neither. An' the fellas that bribed congressmen and the legislatures never went to jail neither.

All over the State, jabbering in the Hoovervilles.

And then the raids—the swoop of armed deputies on the squatters' camps. Get out. Department of Health orders. This camp is a menace to health.

Where we gonna go?

That's none of our business. We got orders to get you out of here. In half an hour we set fire to the camp.

They's typhoid down the line. You want ta spread it all over?

We got orders to get you out of here. Now get! In half an hour we burn the camp.

In half an hour the smoke of paper houses, of weed-thatched huts, rising to the sky, and the people in their cars rolling over the highways, looking for another Hooverville.

And in Kansas and Arkansas, in Oklahoma and Texas and New Mexico, the tractors moved in and pushed the tenants out.

Three hundred thousand in California and more coming. And in California the roads full of frantic people running like ants to pull,

to push, to lift, to work. For every manload to lift, five pairs of arms extended to lift it; for every stomachful of food available, five mouths open.

And the great owners, who must lose their land in an upheaval, the great owners with access to history, with eyes to read history and to know the great fact: when property accumulates in too few hands it is taken away. And that companion fact: when a majority of the people are hungry and cold they will take by force what they need. And the little screaming fact that sounds through all history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed. The great owners ignored the three cries of history. The land fell into fewer hands, the number of the dispossessed increased, and every effort of the great owners was directed at repression. The money was spent for arms, for gas to protect the great holdings, and spies were sent to catch the murmuring of revolt so that it might be stamped out. The changing economy was ignored, plans for the change ignored; and only means to destroy revolt were considered, while the causes of revolt went on.

The tractors which throw men out of work, the belt lines which carry loads, the machines which produce, all were increased; and more and more families scampered on the highways, looking for crumbs from the great holdings, lusting after the land beside the roads. The great owners formed associations for protection and they met to discuss ways to intimidate, to kill, to gas. And always they were in fear of a principal—three hundred thousand—if they ever move under a leader—the end. Three hundred thousand, hungry and miserable; if they ever know themselves, the land will be theirs and all the gas, all the rifles in the world won't stop them. And the great owners, who had become through their holdings both more and less than men, ran to their destruction, and used every means that in the long run would destroy them. Every little means, every violence, every raid on a Hooverville, every deputy swaggering through a ragged camp put off the day a little and cemented the inevitability of the day.

The men squatted on their hams, sharp-faced men, lean from hunger and hard from resisting it, sullen eyes and hard jaws. And the rich land was around them.

D'ja hear about the kid in that fourth tent down?

No, I jus' come in.

Well, that kid's been a-cryin' in his sleep an' a-rollin' in his sleep. Them folks thought he got worms. So they give him a blaster, an' he died. It was what they call black-tongue the kid had. Comes from not gettin' good things to eat.

Poor little fella.

Yeah, but them folks can't bury him. Got to go to the county stone orchard.

Well, hell.

And hands went into pockets and little coins came out. In front of the tent a little heap of silver grew. And the family found it there.

Our people are good people; our people are kind people. Pray God some day kind people won't all be poor. Pray God some day a kid can eat.

And the associations of owners knew that some day the praying would stop.

And there's the end.

Chapter 20

The family, on top of the load, the children and Connie and Rose of Sharon and the preacher were stiff and cramped. They had sat in the heat in front of the coroner's office in Bakersfield while Pa and Ma and Uncle John went in. Then a basket was brought out and the long bundle lifted down from the truck. And they sat in the sun while the examination went on, while the cause of death was found and the certificate signed.

Al and Tom strolled along the street and looked in store windows and watched the strange people on the sidewalks.

And at last Pa and Ma and Uncle John came out, and they were subdued and quiet. Uncle John climbed up on the load. Pa and Ma got in the seat. Tom and Al strolled back and Tom got under the steering wheel. He sat there silently, waiting for some instruction. Pa looked straight ahead, his dark hat pulled low. Ma rubbed the sides of her mouth with her fingers, and her eyes were far away and lost, dead with weariness.

Pa sighed deeply. "They wasn't nothin' else to do," he said.

"I know," said Ma. "She would a liked a nice funeral, though. She always wanted one."

Tom looked sideways at them. "County?" he asked.

"Yeah," Pa shook his head quickly, as though to get back to some reality. "We didn' have enough. We couldn' of done it." He turned to Ma. "You ain't to feel bad. We couldn' no matter how hard we tried, no matter what we done. We jus' didn' have it; embalming, an' a coffinan' a preacher, an' a plot in a graveyard. It would of took ten times what we got. We done the bes' we could."

"I know," Ma said. "I jus' can't get it outa my head what store she set by a nice funeral. Got to forget it." She sighed deeply and rubbed the side of her mouth. "That was a purty nice fella in there. Awful bossy, but he was purty nice."

"Yeah," Pa said. "He give us the straight talk, awright."

Ma brushed her hair back with her hand. Her jaw tightened. "We got to git," she said. "We got to find a place to stay. We got to get work an' settle down. No use a-lettin' the little fellas go hungry. That wasn't never Granma's way. She always et a good meal at a

funeral."

"Where we goin'?" Tom asked.

Pa raised his hat and scratched among his hair. "Camp," he said. "We ain't gonna spen' what little's lef' till we get work. Drive out in the country."

Tom started the car and they rolled through the streets and out toward the country. And by a bridge they saw a collection of tents and shacks. Tom said, "Might's well stop here. Find out what's doin', an' where at the work is." He drove down a steep dirt incline and parked on the edge of the encampment.

There was no order in the camp; little gray tents, shacks, cars were scattered about at random. The first house was nondescript. The south wall was made of three sheets of rusty corrugated iron, the east wall a square of moldy carpet tacked between two boards, the north wall a strip of roofing paper and a strip of tattered canvas, and the west wall six pieces of gunny sacking. Over the square frame, on untrimmed willow limbs, grass had been piled, not thatched, but heaped up in a low mound. The entrance, on the gunny-sack side, was cluttered with equipment. A five-gallon kerosene can served for a stove. It was laid on its side, with a section of rusty stovepipe thrust in one end. A wash boiler rested on its side against the wall; and a collection of boxes lay about, boxes to sit on, to eat on. A Model T Ford sedan and a two-wheel trailer were parked beside the shack, and about the camp there hung a slovenly despair.

Next to the shack there was a little tent, gray with weathering, but neatly, properly set up; and the boxes in front of it were placed against the tent wall. A stovepipe stuck out of the door flap, and the dirt in front of the tent had been swept and sprinkled. A bucketful of soaking clothes stood on a box. The camp was neat and sturdy. A Model A roadster and a little home-made bed trailer stood beside the tent.

And next there was a huge tent, ragged, torn in strips and the tears mended with pieces of wire. The flaps were up, and inside four wide mattresses lay on the ground. A clothes line strung along the side bore pink cotton dresses and several pairs of overalls. There were forty tents and shacks, and beside each habitation some kind of automobile. Far down the line a few children stood and stared at the newly arrived truck, and they moved toward it, little boys in

overalls and bare feet, their hair gray with dust.

Tom stopped the truck and looked at Pa. “She ain’t very purty,” he said. “Want to go somewheres else?”

“Can’t go nowheres else till we know where we’re at,” Pa said. “We got to ast about work.”

Tom opened the door and stepped out. The family climbed down from the load and looked curiously at the camp. Ruthie and Winfield, from the habit of the road, took down the bucket and walked toward the willows, where there would be water; and the line of children parted for them and closed after them.

The flaps of the first shack parted and a woman looked out. Her gray hair was braided, and she wore a dirty, flowered Mother Hubbard. Her face was wizened and dull, deep gray pouches under blank eyes, and a mouth slack and loose.

Pa said, “Can we jus’ pull up anywheres an’ camp?”

The head was withdrawn inside the shack. For a moment there was quiet and then the flaps were pushed aside and a bearded man in shirt sleeves stepped out. The woman looked out after him, but she did not come into the open.

The bearded man said, “Howdy, folks,” and his restless dark eyes jumped to each member of the family, and from them to the truck to the equipment.

Pa said, “I jus’ ast your woman if it’s all right to set out stuff anywheres.”

The bearded man looked at Pa intently, as though he had said something very wise that needed thought. “Set down anywheres, here in this place?” he asked.

“Sure. Anybody own this place, that we got to see ’fore we can camp?”

The bearded man squinted one eye nearly closed and studied Pa. “You wanta camp here?”

Pa’s irritation arose. The gray woman peered out of the burlap shack. “What you think I’m a-sayin’?” Pa said.

“Well, if you wanta camp here, why don’t ya? I ain’t a-stoppin’ you.”

Tom laughed. “He got it.”

Pa gathered his temper. “I jus’ wanted to know does anybody

own it? Do we got to pay?"

The bearded man thrust out his jaw. "Who owns it?" he demanded.

Pa turned away. "The hell with it," he said. The woman's head popped back in the tent.

The bearded man stepped forward menacingly. "Who owns it?" he demanded. "Who's gonna kick us outa here? You tell *me*."

Tom stepped in front of Pa. "You better go take a good long sleep," he said. The bearded man dropped his mouth open and put a dirty finger against his lower gums. For a moment he continued to look wisely, speculatively at Tom, and then he turned on his heel and popped into the shack after the gray woman.

Tom turned on Pa. "What the hell was that?" he asked.

Pa shrugged his shoulders. He was looking across the camp. In front of a tent stood an old Buick, and the head was off. A young man was grinding the valves, and as he twisted back and forth, back and forth, on the tool, he looked up at the Joad truck. They could see that he was laughing to himself. When the bearded man had gone, the young man left his work and sauntered over.

"H'are ya?" he said, and his blue eyes were shiny with amusement. "I seen you just met the Mayor."

"What the hell's the matter with 'im?" Tom demanded.

The young man chuckled. "He's jus' nuts like you an' me. Maybe he's a little nutser'n me, I don' know."

Pa said, "I jus' ast him if we could camp here."

The young man wiped his greasy hands on his trousers. "Sure. Why not? You folks jus' come acrost?"

"Yeah," said Tom. "Jus' got in this mornin'."

"Never been in Hooverville before?"

"Where's Hooverville?"

"This here's her."

"Oh!" said Tom. "We jus' got in."

Winfield and Ruthie came back, carrying a bucket of water between them.

Ma said, "Le's get the camp up. I'm tuckered out. Maybe we can all rest." Pa and Uncle John climbed up on the truck to unload the canvas and the beds.

Tom sauntered to the young man, and walked beside him back to the car he had been working on. The valve-grinding brace lay on the exposed block, and a little yellow can of valve-grinding compound was wedged on top of the vacuum tank. Tom asked, “What the hell was the matter’th that ol’ fella with the beard?”

The young man picked up his brace and went to work, twisting back and forth, grinding valve against valve seat. The Mayor? Chris’ knows. I guess maybe he’s bull-simple.”

“What’s ‘bull-simple’?”

“I guess cops push ’im aroun’ so much he’s still spinning.”

Tom asked, “Why would they push a fella like that aroun’?”

The young man stopped his work and looked in Tom’s eyes. “Chris’ knows,” he said. “You jus’ come. Maybe you can figger her out. Some fellas says one thing, an’ some says another thing. But you jus’ camp in one place a little while, an’ you see how quick a deputy sheriff shoves you along.” He lifted a valve and smeared compound on the seat.

“But what the hell for?”

“I tell ya I don’t know. Some says they don’t want us to vote; keep us movin’ so we can’t vote. An’ some says so we can’t get on relief. An’ some says if we set in one place we’d get organized. I don’ know why. I on’y know we get rode all the time. You wait, you’ll see.”

“We ain’t no bums,” Tom insisted. “We’re lookin’ for work. We’ll take any kind a work.”

The young man paused in fitting the brace to the valve slot. He looked in amazement at Tom. “Lookin’ for work?” he said. “So you’re lookin’ for work. What ya think ever’body else is lookin’ for? Di’monds? What you think I wore my ass down to a nub lookin’ for?” He twisted the brace back and forth.

Tom looked about at the grimy tents, the junk equipment, at the old cars, the lumpy mattresses out in the sun, at the blackened cans on fire-blackened holes where the people cooked. He asked quietly, “Ain’t they no work?”

“I don’ know. Mus’ be. Ain’t no crop right here now. Grapes to pick later, an’ cotton to pick later. We’re a-movin’ on, soon’s I get these here valves groun’. Me an’ my wife an’ my kids. We heard they was work up north. We’re shovin’ north, up aroun’ Salinas.”

Tom saw Uncle John and Pa and the preacher hoisting the tarpaulin on the tent poles and Ma on her knees inside, brushing off the mattresses on the ground. A circle of quiet children stood to watch the new family get settled, quiet children with bare feet and dirty faces. Tom said, “Back home some fellas come through with han’bills—orange ones. Says they need lots a people out here to work the crops.”

The young man laughed. “They say they’s three hunderd thousan’ us folks here, an’ I bet ever’ dam’ fam’ly seen them han’bills.”

“Yeah, but if they don’ need folks, what’d they go to the trouble puttin’ them things out for?”

“Use your head, why don’cha?”

“Yeah, but I wanta know.”

“Look,” the young man said. “S’pose you got a job a work, an’ there’s jus’ one fella wants the job. You got to pay ’im what he asts. But s’pose they’s a hunderd men.” He put down his tool. His eyes hardened and his voice sharpened. “S’pose they’s a hunderd men wants that job. S’pose them men got kids, an’ them kids is hungry. S’pose a lousy dime’ll buy a box a mush for them kids. S’pose a nickel’ll buy at leas’ somepin for them kids. An’ you got a hunderd men. Jus’ offer ’em a nickel—why, they’ll kill each other fightin’ for that nickel. Know what they was payin’, las’ job I had? Fifteen cents an hour. Ten hours for a dollar an’ a half, an’ ya can’t stay on the place. Got to burn gasoline gettin’ there.” He was panting with anger, and his eyes blazed with hate. “That’s why them han’bills was out. You can print a hell of a lot of han’bills with what ya save payin’ fifteen cents an hour for fiel’ work.”

Tom said, “That’s stinkin’.”

The young man laughed harshly. “You stay out here a little while, an’ if you smell any roses, you come let me smell, too.”

“But they is work,” Tom insisted. “Christ Almighty, with all this stuff a-growin’: orchards, grapes, vegetables—I seen it. They got to have men. I seen all that stuff.”

A child cried in the tent beside the car. The young man went into the tent and his voice came softly through the canvas. Tom picked up the brace, fitted it in the slot of the valve, and ground away, his hand whipping back and forth. The child’s crying stopped. The young man came out and watched Tom. “You can do her,” he said.

“Damn good thing. You’ll need to.”

“How ’bout what I said?” Tom resumed. “I seen all the stuff growin’.”

The young man squatted on his heels. “I’ll tell ya,” he said quietly. “They’s a big son-of-a-bitch of a peach orchard I worked in. Takes nine men all the year roun’.” He paused impressively. “Takes three thousan’ men for two weeks when them peaches is ripe. Got to have ’em or them peaches’ll rot. So what do they do? They send out han’bills all over hell. They need three thousan’, an’ they get six thousan’. They get them men for what they wanta pay. If ya don’ wanta take what they pay, goddamn it, they’s a thousan’ men waitin’ for your job. So ya pick, an’ ya pick, an’ then she’s done. Whole part a the country’s peaches. All ripe together. When ya get ’em picked, ever’ goddamn one is picked. There ain’t another damn thing in that part a the country to do. An’ then them owners don’ want you there no more. Three thousan’ of you. The work’s done. You might steal, you might get drunk, you might jus’ raise hell. An’ besides, you don’ look nice, livin’ in ol’ tents; an’ it’s a pretty country, but you stink it up. They don’ want you aroun’. So they kick you out, they move you along. That’s how it is.”

Tom, looking down toward the Joad tent, saw his mother, heavy and slow with weariness, build a little trash fire and put the cooking pots over the flame. The circle of children drew closer, and the calm wide eyes of the children watched every move of Ma’s hands. An old, old man with a bent back came like a badger out of a tent and snooped near, sniffing the air as he came. He laced his arms behind him and joined the children to watch Ma. Ruthie and Winfield stood near to Ma and eyed the strangers belligerently.

Tom said angrily, “Them peaches got to be picked right now, don’t they? Jus’ when they’re ripe?”

“’Course they do.”

“Well, s’pose them people got together an’says, ‘Let ’em rot.’ Wouldn’ be long ’fore the price went up, by God!”

The young man looked up from the valves, looked sardonically at Tom. “Well, you figgered out somepin, didn’ you. Come right outa your own head.”

“I’m tar’d,” said Tom. “Drove all night. I don’t wanta start no argument. An’ I’m so goddamn tar’d I’d argue easy. Don’ be smart with me. I’m askin’ you.”

The young man grinned. “I didn’ mean it. You ain’t been here. Folks figgered that out. An’ the folks with the peach orchard figgered her out too. Look, if the folks gets together, they’s a leader—got to be—fella that does the talkin’. Well, first time this fella opens his mouth they grab ’im an’ stick ’im in jail. An’ if they’s another leader pops up, why, they stick ’*im* in jail.”

Tom said, “Well, a fella eats in jail anyways.”

“His kids don’t. How’d you like to be in an’ your kids starvin’ to death?”

“Yeah,” said Tom slowly. “Yeah.”

“An’ here’s another thing. Ever hear a’ the blacklist?”

“What’s that?”

“Well, you jus’ open your trap about us folks gettin’ together, an’ you’ll see. They take your pitcher an’ send it all over. Then you can’t get work nowhere. An’ if you got kids——”

Tom took off his cap and twisted it in his hands. “So we take what we can get, huh, or we starve; an’ if we yelp we starve.”

The young man made a sweeping circle with his hand, and his hand took in the ragged tents and the rusty cars.

Tom looked down at his mother again, where she sat scraping potatoes. And the children had drawn closer. He said, “I ain’t gonna take it. Goddamn it, I an’ my folks ain’t no sheep. I’ll kick the hell outa somebody.”

“Like a cop?”

“Like anybody.”

“You’re nuts,” said the young man. “They’ll pick you right off. You got no name, no property. They’ll find you in a ditch, with the blood dried on your mouth an’ your nose. Be one little line in the paper—know what it’ll say? ‘Vagrant foun’ dead.’ An’ that’s all. You’ll see a lot of them little lines, ‘Vagrant foun’ dead.’”

Tom said, “They’ll be somebody else foun’ dead right ’longside of this here vagrant.”

“You’re nuts,” said the young man. “Won’t be no good in that.”

“Well, what you doin’ about it?” He looked into the grease-streaked face. And a veil drew down over the eyes of the young man.

“Nothin’. Where you from?”

“Us? Right near Sallisaw, Oklahoma.”

“Jus’ get in?”

“Jus’ today.”

“Gonna be aroun’ here long?”

“Don’t know. We’ll stay wherever we can get work. Why?”

“Nothin’.” And the veil came down again.

“Got to sleep up,” said Tom. “Tomorra we’ll go out lookin’ for work.”

“You kin try.”

Tom turned away and moved toward the Joad tent.

The young man took up the can of valve compound and dug his finger into it. “Hi!” he called.

Tom turned. “What you want?”

“I want ta tell ya.” He motioned with his finger, on which a blob of compound stuck. “I jus’ want ta tell ya. Don’ go lookin’ for no trouble. ’Member how that bull-simple guy looked?”

“Fella in the tent up there?”

“Yeah—looked dumb—no sense?”

“What about him?”

“Well, when the cops come in, an’ they come in all a time, that’s how you want ta be. Dumb—don’t know nothin’. Don’t understan’ nothin’. That’s how the cops like us. Don’t hit no cops. That’s jus’ suicide. Be bull-simple.”

“Let them goddamn cops run over me, an’ me do nothin’?”

“No, looka here. I’ll come for ya tonight. Maybe I’m wrong. There’s stools aroun’ all a time. I’m takin’ a chancet, an’ I got a kid, too. But I’ll come for ya. An’ if ya see a cop, why, you’re a goddamn dumb Okie, see?”

“Tha’s awright if we’re doin’ anythin’,” said Tom.

“Don’ you worry. We’re doin’ somepin, on’y we ain’t stickin’ our necks out. A kid starves quick. Two-three days for a kid.” He went back to his job, spread the compound on a valve seat, and his hand jerked rapidly back and forth on the brace, and his face was dull and dumb.

Tom strolled slowly back to his camp. “Bull-simple,” he said under his breath.

Pa and Uncle John came toward the camp, their arms loaded with dry willow sticks, and they threw them down by the fire and squatted on their hams. “Got her picked over pretty good,” said Pa. “Had ta go a long ways for wood.” He looked up at the circle of staring children. “Lord God Almighty!” he said. “Where’d you come from?” All of the children looked self-consciously at their feet.

“Guess they smelled the cookin’,” said Ma. “Winfiel’, get out from under foot.” She pushed him out of her way. “Got ta make us up a little stew,” she said. “We ain’t et nothin’ cooked right sence we come from home. Pa, you go up to the store there an’ get me some neck meat. Make a nice stew here.” Pa stood up and sauntered away.

Al had the hood of the car up, and he looked down at the greasy engine. He looked up when Tom approached. “You sure look happy as a buzzard,” Al said.

“I’m jus’ gay as a toad in spring rain,” said Tom.

“Looka the engine,” Al pointed. “Purty good, huh?”

Tom peered in. “Looks awright to me.”

“Awright? Jesus, she’s wonderful. She ain’t shot no oil nor nothin’.” He unscrewed a spark plug and stuck his forefinger in the hole. “Crusted up some, but she’s dry.”

Tom said, “You done a nice job a pickin’. That what ya want me to say?”

“Well, I sure was scairt the whole way, figgerin’ she’d bust down an’ it’d be my fault.”

“No, you done good. Better get her in shape, ’cause tomorra we’re goin’ out lookin’ for work.”

“She’ll roll,” said Al. “Don’t you worry none about that.” He took out a pocket knife and scraped the points of the spark plug.

Tom walked around the side of the tent, and he found Casy sitting on the earth, wisely regarding one bare foot. Tom sat down heavily beside him. “Think she’s gonna work?”

“What?” asked Casy.

“Them toes of yourn.”

“Oh! Jus’ settin’ here a-thinkin’.”

“You always get good an’ comf’table for it,” said Tom.

Casy waggled his big toe up and his second toe down, and he

smiled quietly. “Hard enough for a fella to think ’thout kinkin’ himself up to do it.”

“Ain’t heard a peep outa you for days,” said Tom. “Thinkin’ all the time?”

“Yeah, thinkin’ all the time.”

Tom took off his cloth cap, dirty now, and ruinous, the visor pointed as a bird’s beak. He turned the sweat band out and removed a long strip of folded newspaper. “Sweat so much she’s shrank,” he said. He looked at Casy’s waving toes. “Could ya come down from your thinkin’ an’ listen a minute?”

Casy turned his head on the stalk-like neck. “Listen all the time. That’s why I been thinkin’. Listen to people a-talkin’, an’ purty soon I hear the way folks are feelin’. Goin’ on all the time. I hear ’em an’ feel ’em; an’ they’re beating their wings like a bird in a attic. Gonna bust their wings on a dusty winda tryin’ ta get out.”

Tom regarded him with widened eyes, and then he turned and looked at a gray tent twenty feet away. Washed jeans and shirts and a dress hung to dry on the tent guys. He said softly, “That was about what I was gonna tell ya. An’ you seen awready.”

“I seen,” Casy agreed. “They’s a army of us without no harness.” He bowed his head and ran his extended hand slowly up his forehead and into his hair. “All along I seen it,” he said. “Ever’ place we stopped I seen it. Folks hungry for side-meat, an’ when they get it, they ain’t fed. An’ when they’d get so hungry they couldn’ stan’ it no more, why, they’d ast me to pray for ’em, an’ sometimes I done it.” He clasped his hands around drawn-up knees and pulled his legs in. “I use ta think that’d cut ’er,” he said. “Use ta rip off a prayer an’ all the troubles’d stick to that prayer like flies on flypaper, an’ the prayer’d go a-sailin’ off, a-takin’ them troubles along. But it don’ work no more.”

Tom said, “Prayer never brought in no side-meat. Takes a shoat to bring in pork.”

“Yeah,” Casy said. “An’ Almighty God never raised no wages. These here folks want to live decent and bring up their kids decent. An’ when they’re old they wanta set in the door an’ watch the downing sun. An’ when they’re young they wanta dance an’ sing an’ lay together. They wanta eat an’ get drunk and work. An’ that’sit—they wanta jus’fling their goddamn muscles aroun’ an’ get tired. Christ! What’m I talkin’ about?”

“I dunno,” said Tom. “Sounds kinda nice. When ya think you can get ta work an’ quit thinkin’ a spell? We got to get work. Money’s ’bout gone. Pa give five dollars to get a painted piece of board stuck up over Granma. We ain’t got much lef’.”

A lean brown mongrel dog came sniffing around the side of the tent. He was nervous and flexed to run. He sniffed close before he was aware of the two men, and then looking up he saw them, leaped sideways, and fled, ears back, bony tail clamped protectively. Casy watched him go, dodging around a tent to get out of sight. Casy sighed. “I ain’t doin’ nobody no good,” he said. “Me or nobody else. I was thinkin’ I’d go off alone by myself. I’m a-eatin’ your food an’ a-takin’ up room. An’ I ain’t give you nothin’. Maybe I could get a steady job an’ maybe pay back some a the stuff you’ve give me.”

Tom opened his mouth and thrust his lower jaw forward, and he tapped his lower teeth with a dried piece of mustard stalk. His eyes stared over the camp, over the gray tents and the shacks of weed and tin and paper. “Wisht I had a sack a Durham,” he said. “I ain’t had a smoke in a hell of a time. Use ta get tobacco in McAlester. Almost wisht I was back.” He tapped his teeth again and suddenly he turned on the preacher. “Ever been in a jail house?”

“No,” said Casy. “Never been.”

“Don’t go away right yet,” said Tom. “Not right yet.”

“Quicker I get lookin’ for work—quicker I’m gonna find some.”

Tom studied him with half-shut eyes and he put on his cap again. “Look,” he said, “this ain’t no lan’ of milk an’ honey like the preachers say. They’s a mean thing here. The folks here is scared of us people comin’ west; an’ so they got cops out tryin’ to scare us back.”

“Yeah,” said Casy. “I know. What you ask about me bein’ in jail for?”

Tom said slowly, “When you’re in jail—you get to kinda—sensin’ stuff. Guys ain’t let to talk a hell of a lot together—two maybe, but not a crowd. An’ so you get kinda sensy. If somepin’s gonna bust—if say a fella’s goin’ stir-bugs an’ take a crack at a guard with a mop handle—why, you know it ’fore it happens. An’ if they’s gonna be a break or a riot, nobody don’t have to tell ya. You’re sensy about it. You know.”

"Yeah?"

"Stick aroun'," said Tom. "Stick aroun' till tomorra anyways. Somepin's gonna come up. I was talkin' to a kid up the road. An' he's bein' jus' as sneaky an' wise as a dog coyote, but he's too wise. Dog coyote a-mindin' his own business an' innocent an' sweet, jus' havin' fun an' no harm—well, they's a hen roost clost by."

Casy watched him intently, started to ask a question, and then shut his mouth tightly. He waggled his toes slowly and, releasing his knees, pushed out his foot so he could see it. "Yeah," he said, "I won't go right yet."

Tom said, "When a bunch a folks, nice quiet folks, don't know nothin' about nothin'—somepin's goin' on."

"I'll stay," said Casy.

"An' tomorra we'll go out in the truck an' look for work."

"Yeah!" said Casy, and he waved his toes up and down and studied them gravely. Tom settled back on his elbow and closed his eyes. Inside the tent he could hear the murmur of Rose of Sharon's voice and Connie's answering.

The tarpaulin made a dark shadow and the wedge-shaped light at each end was hard and sharp. Rose of Sharon lay on a mattress and Connie squatted beside her. "I oughta help Ma," Rose of Sharon said. "I tried, but ever' time I stirred about I throwed up."

Connie's eyes were sullen. "If I'd of knowed it would be like this I wouldn' of came. I'd a studied nights 'bout tractors back home an' got me a three-dollar job. Fella can live awful nice on three dollars a day, an' go to the pitcher show ever' night, too."

Rose of Sharon looked apprehensive. "You're gonna study nights 'bout radios," she said. He was long in answering. "Ain't you?" she demanded.

"Yeah, sure. Soon's I get on my feet. Get a little money."

She rolled up on her elbow. "You ain't givin' it up!"

"No—no—'course not. But—I didn' know they was places like this we got to live in."

The girl's eyes hardened. "You got to," she said quietly.

"Sure. Sure, I know. Got to get on my feet. Get a little money. Would a been better maybe to stay home an' study 'bout tractors. Three dollars a day they get, an' pick up extra money, too." Rose of Sharon's eyes were calculating. When he looked down at her he saw

in her eyes a measuring of him, a calculation of him. “But I’m gonna study,” he said. “Soon’s I get on my feet.”

She said fiercely, “We got to have a house ’fore the baby comes. We ain’t gonna have this baby in no tent.”

“Sure,” he said. “Soon’s I get on my feet.” He went out of the tent and looked down at Ma, crouched over the brush fire. Rose of Sharon rolled on her back and stared at the top of the tent. And then she put her thumb in her mouth for a gag and she cried silently.

Ma knelt beside the fire, breaking twigs to keep the flame up under the stew kettle. The fire flared and dropped and flared and dropped. The children, fifteen of them, stood silently and watched. And when the smell of the cooking stew came to their noses, their noses crinkled slightly. The sunlight glistened on hair tawny with dust. The children were embarrassed to be there, but they did not go. Ma talked quietly to a little girl who stood inside the lusting circle. She was older than the rest. She stood on one foot, caressing the back of her leg with a bare instep. Her arms were clasped behind her. She watched Ma with steady small gray eyes. She suggested, “I could break up some bresh if you want me, ma’am.”

Ma looked up from her work. “You want ta get ast to eat, huh?”

“Yes, ma’am,” the girl said steadily.

Ma slipped the twigs under the pot and the flame made a puttering sound. “Didn’ you have no breakfast?”

“No, ma’am. They ain’t no work hereabouts. Pa’s in tryin’ to sell some stuff to git gas so’s we can git ’long.”

Ma looked up. “Didn’ none of these here have no breakfast?”

The circle of children shifted nervously and looked away from the boiling kettle. One small boy said boastfully, “I did—me an’ my brother did—an’ them two did, ’cause I seen ’em. We et good. We’re a-goin’ south tonight.”

Ma smiled. “Then you ain’t hungry. They ain’t enough here to go around.”

The small boy’s lip stuck out. “We et good,” he said, and he turned and ran and dived into a tent. Ma looked after him so long that the oldest girl reminded her.

“The fire’s down, ma’am. I can keep it up if you want.”

Ruthie and Winfield stood inside the circle, comporting

themselves with proper frigidity and dignity. They were aloof, and at the same time possessive. Ruthie turned cold and angry eyes on the little girl. Ruthie squatted down to break up the twigs for Ma.

Ma lifted the kettle lid and stirred the stew with a stick. “I’m sure glad some of you ain’t hungry. That little fella ain’t, anyways.”

The girl sneered. “Oh, him! He was a-braggin’. High an’ mighty. If he don’t have no supper—know what he done? Las’ night, come out an’ say they got chicken to eat. Well, sir, I looked in whilst they was a-eatin’ an’ it was fried dough jus’ like ever’body else.”

“Oh!” And Ma looked down toward the tent where the small boy had gone. She looked back at the little girl. “How long you been in California?” she asked.

“Oh, ’bout six months. We lived in a gov’ment camp a while, an’ then we went north, an’ when we come back it was full up. That’s a nice place to live, you bet.”

“Where’s that?” Ma asked. And she took the sticks from Ruthie’s hand and fed the fire. Ruthie glared with hatred at the older girl.

“Over by Weedpatch. Got nice toilets an’ baths, an’ you kin wash clothes in a tub, an’ they’s water right handy, good drinkin’ water; an’ nights the folks plays music an’ Sat’dy night they give a dance. Oh, you never seen anything so nice. Got a place for kids to play, an’ them toilets with paper. Pull down a little jigger an’ the water comes right in the toilet, an’ they ain’t no cops let to come look in your tent any time they want, an’ the fella runs the camp is so polite, comes a-visitin’ an’ talks an’ ain’t high an’ mighty. I wisht we could go live there again.”

Ma said, “I never heard about it. I sure could use a wash tub, I tell you.”

The girl went on excitedly, “Why, God Awmighty, they got hot water right in pipes, an’ you get in under a shower bath an’ it’s warm. You never seen such a place.”

Ma said, “All full now, ya say?”

“Yeah. Las’ time we ast it was.”

“Mus’ cost a lot,” said Ma.

“Well, it costs, but if you ain’t got the money, they let you work it out—couple hours a week, cleanin’ up, an’ garbage cans. Stuff like that. An’ nights they’s music an’ folks talks together an’ hot water right in the pipes. You never seen nothin’ so nice.”

Ma said, “I sure wisht we could go there.”

Ruthie had stood all she could. She blurted fiercely, “Granma died right on top a the truck.” The girl looked questioningly at her. “Well, she did,” Ruthie said. “An’ the cor’ner got her.” She closed her lips tightly and broke up a little pile of sticks.

Winfield blinked at the boldness of the attack. “Right on the truck,” he echoed. “Cor’ner stuck her in a big basket.”

Ma said, “You shush now, both of you, or you got to go away.” And she fed twigs into the fire.

Down the line Al had strolled to watch the valve-grinding job. “Looks like you’re ’bout through,” he said.

“Two more.”

“Is they any girls in this here camp?”

“I got a wife,” said the young man. “I got no time for girls.”

“I always got time for girls,” said Al. “I got no time for nothin’ else.”

“You get a little hungry an’ you’ll change.”

Al laughed. “Maybe. But I ain’t never changed that notion yet.”

“Fella I talked to while ago, he’s with you, ain’t he?”

“Yeah! My brother Tom. Better not fool with him. He killed a fella.”

“Did? What for?”

“Fight. Fella got a knife in Tom. Tom busted ’im with a shovel.”

“Did, huh? What’d the law do?”

“Let ’im off ’cause it was a fight,” said Al.

“He don’t look like a quarreler.”

“Oh, he ain’t. But Tom don’t take nothin’ from nobody.” Al’s voice was very proud. “Tom, he’s quiet. But—look out!”

“Well—I talked to ’im. He didn’ soun’ mean.”

“He ain’t. Jus’ as nice as pie till he’s roused, an’ then—look out.” The young man ground at the last valve. “Like me to he’p you get them valves set an’ the head on?”

“Sure, if you got nothin’ else to do.”

“Oughta get some sleep,” said Al. “But, hell, I can’t keep my han’s out of a tore-down car. Jus’ got to git in.”

“Well, I’d admire to git a hand,” said the young man. “My name’s

Floyd Knowles."

"I'm Al Joad."

"Proud to meet ya."

"Me too," said Al. "Gonna use the same gasket?"

"Got to," said Floyd.

Al took out his pocket knife and scraped at the block. "Jesus!" he said. "They ain't nothin' I love like the guts of a engine."

"How 'bout girls?"

"Yeah, girls too! Wisht I could tear down a Rolls an' put her back. I looked under the hood of a Cad' 16 one time an', God Awmighty, you never seen nothin' so sweet in your life! In Sallisaw—an' here's this 16 a-standin' in front of a restaurant, so I lifts the hood. An' a guy comes out an' says, 'What the hell you doin'?' I says, 'Jus' lookin'. Ain't she swell?' An' he jus' stands there. I don't think he ever looked in her before. Jus' stands there. Rich fella in a straw hat. Got a stripe' shirt on, an' eye glasses. We don' say nothin'. Jus' look. An' purty soon he says, 'How'd you like to drive her?'"

Floyd said, "The hell!"

"Sure—'How'd you like to drive her?' Well, hell, I got on jeans—all dirty. I says, 'I'd get her dirty.' 'Come on!' he says. 'Jus' take her roun' the block.' Well, sir, I set in that seat an' I took her roun' the block eight times, an', oh, my God Almighty!"

"Nice?" Floyd asked.

"Oh, Jesus!" said Al. "If I could of tore her down why—I'd a give—anythin'."

Floyd slowed his jerking arm. He lifted the last valve from its seat and looked at it. "You better git use' ta a jalopy," he said, "'cause you ain't goin' a drive no 16." He put his brace down on the running board and took up a chisel to scrape the crust from the block. Two stocky women, bare-headed and bare-footed, went by carrying a bucket of milky water between them. They limped against the weight of the bucket, and neither one looked up from the ground. The sun was half down in afternoon.

Al said, "You don't like nothin' much."

Floyd scraped harder with the chisel. "I been here six months," he said. "I been scrabblin' over this here State tryin' to work hard enough and move fast enough to get meat an' potatoes for me an' my wife an' my kids. I've run myself like a jackrabbit an'—I can't

quite make her. There just ain't quite enough to eat no matter what I do. I'm gettin' tired, that's all. I'm gettin' tired way past where sleep rests me. An' I jus' don' know what to do."

"Ain't there no steady work for a fella?" Al asked.

"No, they ain't no steady work." With his chisel he pushed the crust off the block, and he wiped the dull metal with a greasy rag.

A rusty touring car drove down into the camp and there were four men in it, men with brown hard faces. The car drove slowly through the camp. Floyd called to them, "Any luck?"

The car stopped. The driver said, "We covered a hell of a lot a ground. They ain't a hand's work in this here country. We gotta move."

"Where to?" Al called.

"God knows. We worked this here place over." He let in his clutch and moved slowly down the camp.

Al looked after them. "Wouldn' it be better if one fella went alone? Then if they was one piece a work, a fella'd get it."

Floyd put down the chisel and smiled sourly. "You ain't learned," he said. "Takes gas to get roun' the country. Gas costs fifteen cents a gallon. Them four fellas can't take four cars. So each of 'em puts in a dime an' they get gas. You got to learn."

"Al!"

Al looked down at Winfield standing importantly beside him. "Al, Ma's dishin' up stew. She says come git it."

Al wiped his hands on his trousers. "We ain't et today," he said to Floyd. "I'll come give you a han' when I eat."

"No need 'less you want ta."

"Sure, I'll do it." He followed Winfield toward the Joad camp.

It was crowded now. The strange children stood close to the stew pot, so close that Ma brushed them with her elbows as she worked. Tom and Uncle John stood beside her.

Ma said helplessly, "I dunno what to do. I got to feed the fambly. What'm I gonna do with these here?" The children stood stiffly and looked at her. Their faces were blank, rigid, and their eyes went mechanically from the pot to the tin plate she held. Their eyes followed the spoon from pot to plate, and when she passed the steaming plate up to Uncle John, their eyes followed it up. Uncle

John dug his spoon into the stew, and the banked eyes rose up with the spoon. A piece of potato went into John's mouth and the banked eyes were on his face, watching to see how he would react. Would it be good? Would he like it?

And then Uncle John seemed to see them for the first time. He chewed slowly. "You take this here," he said to Tom. "I ain't hungry."

"You ain't et today," Tom said.

"I know, but I got a stomickache. I ain't hungry."

Tom said quietly, "You take that plate inside the tent an' you eat it."

"I ain't hungry," John insisted. "I'd still see 'em inside the tent."

Tom turned on the children. "You git," he said. "Go on now, git." The bank of eyes left the stew and rested wondering on his face. "Go on now, git. You ain't doin' no good. There ain't enough for you."

Ma ladled stew into the tin plates, very little stew, and she laid the plates on the ground. "I can't send 'em away," she said. "I don' know what to do. Take your plates an' go inside. I'll let 'em have what's lef'. Here, take a plate in to Rosasharn." She smiled up at the children. "Look," she said, "you little fellas go an' get you each a flat stick an' I'll put what's lef' for you. But they ain't to be no fightin'." The group broke up with a deadly, silent swiftness. Children ran to find sticks, they ran to their own tents and brought spoons. Before Ma had finished with the plates they were back, silent and wolfish. Ma shook her head. "I dunno what to do. I can't rob the fambly. I got to feed the fambly. Ruthie, Winfiel', Al," she cried fiercely. "Take your plates. Hurry up. Git in the tent quick." She looked apologetically at the waiting children. "There ain't enough," she said humbly. "I'm a-gonna set this here kettle out, an' you'll all get a little tas', but it ain't gonna do you no good." She faltered, "I can't he'p it. Can't keep it from you." She lifted the pot and set it down on the ground. "Now wait. It's too hot," she said, and she went into the tent quickly so she would not see. Her family sat on the ground, each with his plate; and outside they could hear the children digging into the pot with their sticks and their spoons and their pieces of rusty tin. A mound of children smothered the pot from sight. They did not talk, did not fight or argue; but there was a quiet intentness in all of them, a wooden fierceness. Ma turned her

back so she couldn't see. "We can't do that no more," she said. "We got to eat alone." There was the sound of scraping at the kettle, and then the mound of children broke and the children walked away and left the scraped kettle on the ground. Ma looked at the empty plates. "Didn' none of you get nowhere near enough."

Pa got up and left the tent without answering. The preacher smiled to himself and lay back on the ground, hands clasped behind his head. Al got to his feet. "Got to help a fella with a car."

Ma gathered the plates and took them outside to wash. "Ruthie," she called, "Winfiel'. Go get me a bucket a water right off." She handed them the bucket and they trudged off toward the river.

A strong broad woman walked near. Her dress was streaked with dust and splotched with car oil. Her chin was held high with pride. She stood a short distance away and regarded Ma belligerently. At last she approached. "Afternoon," she said coldly.

"Afternoon," said Ma, and she got up from her knees and pushed a box forward. "Won't you set down?"

The woman walked near. "No, I won't set down."

Ma looked questioningly at her. "Can I he'p you in any way?"

The woman set her hands on her hips. "You kin he'p me by mindin' your own childern an' lettin' mine alone."

Ma's eyes opened wide. "I ain't done nothin'—" she began.

The woman scowled at her. "My little fella come back smellin' of stew. You give it to 'im. He tol' me. Don' you go a-boastin' an' a-braggin' 'bout havin' stew. Don' you do it. I got 'nuf troubles 'thout that. Come in ta me, he did, an' says, 'Whyn't we have stew?'" Her voice shook with fury.

Ma moved close. "Set down," she said. "Set down an' talk a piece."

"No, I ain't gonna set down. I'm tryin' to feed my folks, an' you come along with your stew."

"Set down," Ma said. "That was 'bout the las' stew we're gonna have till we get work. S'pose you was cookin' a stew an' a bunch a little fellas stood aroun' moonin', what'd you do? We didn't have enough, but you can't keep it when they look at ya like that."

The woman's hands dropped from her hips. For a moment her eyes questioned Ma, and then she turned and walked quickly away, and she went into a tent and pulled the flaps down behind her. Ma

stared after her, and then she dropped to her knees again beside the stack of tin dishes.

Al hurried near. “Tom,” he called. “Ma, is Tom inside?”

Tom stuck his head out. “What you want?”

“Come on with me,” Al said excitedly.

They walked away together. “What’s a matter with you?” Tom asked.

“You’ll find out. Jus’ wait.” He led Tom to the torn-down car. “This here’s Floyd Knowles,” he said.

“Yeah, I talked to him. How ya?”

“Jus’ gettin’ her in shape,” Floyd said.

Tom ran his finger over the top of the block. “What kinda bugs is crawlin’ on you, Al?”

“Floyd jus’ tol’ me. Tell ’em, Floyd.”

Floyd said, “Maybe I shouldn’, but—yeah, I’ll tell ya. Fella come through an’ he says they’s gonna be work up north.”

“Up north?”

“Yeah—place called Santa Clara Valley, way to hell an’ gone up north.”

“Yeah? Kinda work?”

“Prune pickin’, an’ pears an’ cannery work. Says it’s purty near ready.”

“How far?” Tom demanded.

“Oh, Christ knows. Maybe two hundred miles.”

“That’s a hell of a long ways,” said Tom. “How we know they’s gonna be work when we get there?”

“Well, we don’ know,” said Floyd. “But they ain’t nothin’ here, an’ this fella says he got a letter from his brother, an’ he’s on his way. He says not to tell nobody, they’ll be too many. We oughta get out in the night. Oughta get there an’ get some work lined up.”

Tom studied him. “Why we gotta sneak away?”

“Well, if ever’body gets there, ain’t gonna be work for nobody.”

“It’s a hell of a long ways,” Tom said.

Floyd sounded hurt. “I’m jus’ givin’ you the tip. You don’ have to take it. Your brother here he’ped me, an’ I’m givin’ you the tip.”

“You sure there ain’t no work here?”

“Look, I been scourin’ aroun’ for three weeks all over hell, an’ I ain’t had a bit a work, not a single han’-holt. ’F you wanta look aroun’ an’ burn up gas lookin’, why, go ahead. I ain’t beggin’ you. More that goes, the less chance I got.”

Tom said, “I ain’t findin’ fault. It’s jus’ such a hell of a long ways. An’ we kinda hoped we could get work here an’ rent a house to live in.”

Floyd said patiently, “I know ya jus’ got here. They’s stuff ya got to learn. If you’d let me tell ya, it’d save ya somepin. If ya don’ let me tell ya, then ya got to learn the hard way. You ain’t gonna settle down ’cause they ain’t no work to settle ya. An’ your belly ain’t gonna let ya settle down. Now—that’s straight.”

“Wisht I could look aroun’ first,” Tom said uneasily.

A sedan drove through the camp and pulled up at the next tent. A man in overalls and a blue shirt climbed out. Floyd called to him, “Any luck?”

“There ain’t a han’-turn of work in the whole darn country, not till cotton pickin’.” And he went into the ragged tent.

“See?” said Floyd.

“Yeah, I see. But two hunderd miles, Jesus!”

“Well, you ain’t settlin’ down no place for a while. Might’s well make up your mind to that.”

“We better go,” Al said.

Tom asked, “When is they gonna be work aroun’ here?”

“Well, in a month the cotton’ll start. If you got plenty money you can wait for the cotton.”

Tom said, “Ma ain’t a-gonna wanta move. She’s all tar’d out.”

Floyd shrugged his shoulders. “I ain’t a-tryin’ to push ya north. Suit yaself. I jus’ tol’ ya what I heard.” He picked the oily gasket from the running board and fitted it carefully on the block and pressed it down. “Now,” he said to Al, “’f you want to give me a han’ with that engine head.”

Tom watched while they set the heavy head gently down over the head bolts and dropped it evenly. “Have to talk about it,” he said.

Floyd said, “I don’t want nobody but your folks to know about it. Jus’ you. An’ I wouldn’t of tol’ you if ya brother didn’ he’p me out here.”

Tom said, “Well, I sure thank ya for tellin’ us. We got to figger it out. Maybe we’ll go.”

Al said, “By God, I think I’ll go if the res’ goes or not. I’ll hitch there.”

“An’ leave the fambly?” Tom asked.

“Sure. I’d come back with my jeans plumb fulla jack. Why not?”

“Ma ain’t gonna like no such thing,” Tom said. “An’ Pa, he ain’t gonna like it neither.”

Floyd set the nuts and screwed them down as far as he could with his fingers. “Me an’ my wife come out with our folks,” he said. “Back home we wouldn’ of thought of goin’ away. Wouldn’ of thought of it. But, hell, we was all up north a piece and I come down here, an’ they moved on, an’ now God knows where they are. Been lookin’ an’ askin’ about ’em ever since.” He fitted his wrench to the enginehead bolts and turned them down evenly, one turn to each nut, around and around the series.

Tom squatted down beside the car and squinted his eyes up the line of tents. A little stubble was beaten into the earth between the tents. “No, sir,” he said, “Ma ain’t gonna like you goin’ off.”

“Well, seems to me a lone fella got more chance of work.”

“Maybe, but Ma ain’t gonna like it at all.”

Two cars loaded with disconsolate men drove down into the camp. Floyd lifted his eyes, but he didn’t ask them about their luck. Their dusty faces were sad and resistant. The sun was sinking now, and the yellow sunlight fell on the Hooverville and on the willows behind it. The children began to come out of the tents, to wander about the camp. And from the tents the women came and built their little fires. The men gathered in squatting groups and talked together.

A new Chevrolet coupé turned off the highway and headed down into the camp. It pulled to the center of the camp. Tom said, “Who’s this? They don’t belong here.”

Floyd said, “I dunno—cops, maybe.”

The car door opened and a man got out and stood beside the car. His companion remained seated. Now all the squatting men looked at the newcomers and the conversation was still. And the women building their fires looked secretly at the shiny car. The children moved closer with elaborate circuitousness, edging inward in long

curves.

Floyd put down his wrench. Tom stood up. Al wiped his hands on his trousers. The three strolled toward the Chevrolet. The man who had got out of the car was dressed in khaki trousers and a flannel shirt. He wore a flat-brimmed Stetson hat. A sheaf of papers was held in his shirt pocket by a little fence of fountain pens and yellow pencils; and from his hip pocket protruded a notebook with metal covers. He moved to one of the groups of squatting men, and they looked up at him, suspicious and quiet. They watched him and did not move; the whites of their eyes showed beneath the irises, for they did not raise their heads to look. Tom and Al and Floyd strolled casually near.

The man said, "You men want to work?" Still they looked quietly, suspiciously. And men from all over the camp moved near.

One of the squatting men spoke at last. "Sure we wanta work. Where's at's work?"

"Tulare County. Fruit's opening up. Need a lot of pickers."

Floyd spoke up. "You doin' the hiring?"

"Well, I'm contracting the land."

The men were in a compact group now. An overalled man took off his black hat and combed back his long black hair with his fingers. "What you payin'?" he asked.

"Well, can't tell exactly, yet. 'Bout thirty cents, I guess."

"Why can't you tell? You took the contract, didn' you?"

"That's true," the khaki man said. "But it's keyed to the price. Might be a little more, might be a little less."

Floyd stepped out ahead. He said quietly, "I'll go, mister. You're a contractor, an' you got a license. You jus' show your license, an' then you give us an order to go to work, an' where, an' when, an' how much we'll get, an' you sign that, an' we'll all go."

The contractor turned, scowling. "You telling me how to run my own business?"

Floyd said, "'F we're workin' for you, it's our business too."

"Well, you ain't telling me what to do. I told you I need men."

Floyd said angrily, "You didn' say how many men, an' you didn' say what you'd pay."

"Goddamn it, I don't know yet."

"If you don' know, you got no right to hire men."

"I got a right to run my business my own way. If you men want to sit here on your ass, O.K. I'm out getting men for Tulare County. Going to need a lot of men."

Floyd turned to the crowd of men. They were standing up now, looking quietly from one speaker to the other. Floyd said, "Twicet now I've fell for that. Maybe he needs a thousan' men. He'll get five thousan' there, an' he'll pay fifteen cents an hour. An' you poor bastards'll have to take it 'cause you'll be hungry. 'F he wants to hire men, let him hire 'em an' write it out an' say what he's gonna pay. Ast ta see his license. He ain't allowed to contract men without a license."

The contractor turned to the Chevrolet and called, "Joe!" His companion looked out and then swung the car door open and stepped out. He wore riding breeches and laced boots. A heavy pistol holster hung on a cartridge belt around his waist. On his brown shirt a deputy sheriff's star was pinned. He walked heavily over. His face was set to a thin smile. "What you want?" The holster slid back and forth on his hip.

"Ever see this guy before, Joe?"

The deputy asked "Which one?"

"This fella." The contractor pointed to Floyd.

"What'd he do?" The deputy smiled at Floyd.

"He's talkin' red, agitating trouble."

"Hm-m-m." The deputy moved slowly around to see Floyd's profile, and the color slowly flowed up Floyd's face.

"You see?" Floyd cried. "If this guy's on the level, would he bring a cop along?"

"Ever see 'im before?" the contractor insisted.

"Hmm, seems like I have. Las' week when that used-car lot was busted into. Seems like I seen this fella hangin' aroun'. Yep! I'd swear it's the same fella." Suddenly the smile left his face. "Get in that car," he said, and he unhooked the strap that covered the butt of his automatic.

Tom said, "You got nothin' on him."

The deputy swung around. "'F you'd like to go in too, you jus' open your trap once more. They was two fellas hangin' around that lot."

“I wasn’t even in the State las’ week,” Tom said.

“Well, maybe you’re wanted someplace else. You keep your trap shut.”

The contractor turned back to the men. “You fellas don’t want ta listen to these goddamn reds. Troublemakers—they’ll get you in trouble. Now I can use all of you in Tulare County.”

The men didn’t answer.

The deputy turned back to them. “Might be a good idear to go,” he said. The thin smile was back on his face. “Board of Health says we got to clean out this camp. An’ if it gets around that you got reds out here—why, somebody might git hurt. Be a good idear if all you fellas moved on to Tulare. They isn’t a thing to do aroun’ here. That’s jus’ a friendly way a telling you. Be a bunch a guys down here, maybe with pick handles, if you ain’t gone.”

The contractor said, “I told you I need men. If you don’t want to work—well, that’s your business.”

The deputy smiled. “If they don’t want to work, they ain’t a place for ’em in this county. We’ll float ’em quick.”

Floyd stood stiffly beside the deputy, and Floyd’s thumbs were hooked over his belt. Tom stole a look at him, and then stared at the ground.

“That’s all,” the contractor said. “There’s men needed in Tulare County; plenty of work.”

Tom looked slowly up at Floyd’s hands, and he saw the strings at the wrists standing out under the skin. Tom’s own hands came up, and his thumbs hooked over his belt.

“Yeah, that’s all. I don’t want one of you here by tomorra morning.”

The contractor stepped into the Chevrolet.

“Now, you,” the deputy said to Floyd, “you get in that car.” He reached a large hand up and took hold of Floyd’s left arm. Floyd spun and swung with one movement. His fist splashed into the large face, and in the same motion he was away, dodging down the line of tents. The deputy staggered and Tom put out his foot for him to trip over. The deputy fell heavily and rolled, reaching for his gun. Floyd dodged in and out of sight down the line. The deputy fired from the ground. A woman in front of a tent screamed and then looked at a hand which had no knuckles. The fingers hung on

strings against her palm, and the torn flesh was white and bloodless. Far down the line Floyd came in sight, sprinting for the willows. The deputy, sitting on the ground, raised his gun again and then, suddenly, from the group of men, the Reverend Casy stepped. He kicked the deputy in the neck and then stood back as the heavy man crumpled into unconsciousness.

The motor of the Chevrolet roared and it streaked away, churning the dust. It mounted to the highway and shot away. In front of her tent, the woman still looked at her shattered hand. Little droplets of blood began to ooze from the wound. And a chuckling hysteria began in her throat, a whining laugh that grew louder and higher with each breath.

The deputy lay on his side, his mouth open against the dust.

Tom picked up his automatic, pulled out the magazine and threw it into the brush, and he ejected the live shell from the chamber. "Fella like that ain't got no right to a gun," he said; and he dropped the automatic to the ground.

A crowd had collected around the woman with the broken hand, and her hysteria increased, a screaming quality came into her laughter.

Casy moved close to Tom. "You got to git out," he said. "You go down in the willas an' wait. He didn' see me kick 'im, but he seen you stick out your foot."

"I don' want ta go," Tom said.

Casy put his head close. He whispered, "They'll fingerprint you. You broke parole. They'll send you back."

Tom drew in his breath quietly. "Jesus! I forgot."

"Go quick," Casy said. "'Fore he comes to."

"Like to have his gun," Tom said.

"No. Leave it. If it's awright to come back, I'll give ya four high whistles."

Tom strolled away casually, but as soon as he was away from the group he hurried his steps, and he disappeared among the willows that lined the river.

Al stepped over to the fallen deputy. "Jesus," he said admiringly, "you sure flagged 'im down!"

The crowd of men had continued to stare at the unconscious man. And now in the great distance a siren screamed up the scale and

dropped, and it screamed again, nearer this time. Instantly the men were nervous. They shifted their feet for a moment and then they moved away, each one to his own tent. Only Al and the preacher remained.

Casy turned to Al. “Get out,” he said. “Go on, get out—to the tent. You don’t know nothin’.”

“Yeah? How ’bout you?”

Casy grinned at him. “Somebody got to take the blame. I got no kids. They’ll jus’ put me in jail, an’ I ain’t doin’ nothin’ but set aroun’.”

Al said, “Ain’t no reason for —”

“Go on now,” Casy said sharply. “You get outa this.”

Al bristled. “I ain’t takin’ orders.”

Casy said softly, “If you mess in this your whole fambly, all your folks, gonna get in trouble. I don’ care about you. But your ma and your pa, they’ll get in trouble. Maybe they’ll send Tom back to McAlester.”

Al considered it for a moment. “O.K.,” he said. “I think you’re a damn fool, though.”

“Sure,” said Casy. “Why not?”

The siren screamed again and again, and always it came closer. Casy knelt beside the deputy and turned him over. The man groaned and fluttered his eyes, and he tried to see. Casy wiped the dust off his lips. The families were in the tents now, and the flaps were down, and the setting sun made the air red and the gray tents bronze.

Tires squealed on the highway and an open car came swiftly into the camp. Four men, armed with rifles, piled out. Casy stood up and walked to them.

“What the hell’s goin’ on here?”

Casy said, “I knocked out your man there.”

One of the armed men went to the deputy. He was conscious now, trying weakly to sit up.

“Now what happened here?”

“Well,” Casy said, “he got tough an’ I hit ’im, and he started shootin’—hit a woman down the line. So I hit ’im again.”

“Well, what’d you do in the first place?”

“I talked back,” said Casy.

“Get in that car.”

“Sure,” said Casy, and he climbed into the back seat and sat down. Two men helped the hurt deputy to his feet. He felt his neck gingerly. Casy said, “They’s a woman down the row like to bleed to death from his bad shootin’.”

“We’ll see about that later. Mike is this the fella that hit you?”

The dazed man stared sickly at Casy. “Don’t look like him.”

“It was me, all right,” Casy said. “You got smart with the wrong fella.”

Mike shook his head slowly. “You don’t look like the right fella to me. By God, I’m gonna be sick!”

Casy said, “I’ll go ’thout no trouble. You better see how bad that woman’s hurt.”

“Where’s she?”

“That tent over there.”

The leader of the deputies walked to the tent, rifle in hand. He spoke through the tent walls, and then went inside. In a moment he came out and walked back. And he said, a little proudly, “Jesus, what a mess a . 45 does make! They got a tourniquet on. We’ll send a doctor out.”

Two deputies sat on either side of Casy. The leader sounded his horn. There was no movement in the camp. The flaps were down tight, and the people in their tents. The engine started and the car swung around and pulled out of the camp. Between his guards Casy sat proudly, his head up and the stringy muscles of his neck prominent. On his lips there was a faint smile and on his face a curious look of conquest.

When the deputies had gone, the people came out of the tents. The sun was down now, and the gentle blue evening light was in the camp. To the east the mountains were still yellow with sunlight. The women went back to the fires that had died. The men collected to squat together and to talk softly.

Al crawled from under the Joad tarpaulin and walked toward the willows to whistle for Tom. Ma came out and built her little fire of twigs.

“Pa,” she said, “we ain’t goin’ to have much. We et so late.”

Pa and Uncle John stuck close to the camp, watching Ma peeling potatoes and slicing them raw into a frying pan of deep grease. Pa said, “Now what the hell made the preacher do that?”

Ruthie and Winfield crept close and crouched down to hear the talk.

Uncle John scratched the earth deeply with a long rusty nail. “He knowed about sin. I ast him about sin, an’ he tol’ me; but I don’ know if he’s right. He says a fella’s sinned if he thinks he’s sinned.” Uncle John’s eyes were tired and sad. “I been secret all my days,” he said. “I done things I never tol’ about.”

Ma turned from the fire. “Don’ go tellin’, John,” she said. “Tell ’em to God. Don’ go burdenin’ other people with your sins. That ain’t decent.”

“They’re a-eatin’ on me,” said John.

“Well, don’ tell ’em. Go down the river an’ stick your head under an’ whisper ’em in the stream.”

Pa nodded his head slowly at Ma’s words. “She’s right,” he said. “It gives a fella relief to tell, but it jus’ spreads out his sin.”

Uncle John looked up to the sun-gold mountains, and the mountains were reflected in his eyes. “I wisht I could run it down,” he said. “But I can’t. She’s a-bitin’ in my guts.”

Behind him Rose of Sharon moved dizzily out of the tent. “Where’s Connie?” she asked irritably. “I ain’t seen Connie for a long time. Where’d he go?”

“I ain’t seen him,” said Ma. “If I see ’im, I’ll tell ’im you want ’im.”

“I ain’t feelin’ good,” said Rose of Sharon. “Connie shouldn’ of left me.”

Ma looked up to the girl’s swollen face. “You been a-cryin’,” she said.

The tears started freshly in Rose of Sharon’s eyes.

Ma went on firmly, “You git aholt on yaself. They’s a lot of us here. You git aholt on yaself. Come here now an’ peel some potatoes. You’re feelin’ sorry for yaself.”

The girl started to go back in the tent. She tried to avoid Ma’s stern eyes, but they compelled her and she came slowly toward the fire. “He shouldn’ of went away,” she said, but the tears were gone.

“You got to work,” Ma said. “Set in the tent an’ you’ll get feelin’ sorry about yaself. I ain’t had time to take you in han’. I will now. You take this here knife an’ get to them potatoes.”

The girl knelt down and obeyed. She said fiercely, “Wait’ll I see ’im. I’ll tell ’im.”

Ma smiled slowly. “He might smack you. You got it comin’ with whinin’ aroun’ an’ candyin’ yaself. If he smacks some sense in you I’ll bless ’im.” The girl’s eyes blazed with resentment, but she was silent.

Uncle John pushed his rusty nail deep into the ground with his broad thumb. “I got to tell,” he said.

Pa said, “Well, tell then, goddamn it! Who’d ya kill?”

Uncle John dug with his thumb into the watch pocket of his blue jeans and scooped out a folded dirty bill. He spread it out and showed it. “Fi’ dollars,” he said.

“Steal her?” Pa asked.

“No, I had her. Kept her out.”

“She was yourn, wasn’t she?”

“Yeah, but I didn’t have no right to keep her out.”

“I don’t see much sin in that,” Ma said. “It’s yourn.”

Uncle John said slowly, “It ain’t only the keepin’ her out. I kep’ her out to get drunk. I knowed they was gonna come a time when I got to get drunk, when I’d get to hurtin’ inside so I got to get drunk. Figgered time wasn’ yet, an’ then—the preacher went an’ give ’imself up to save Tom.”

Pa nodded his head up and down and cocked his head to hear. Ruthie moved closer, like a puppy, crawling on her elbows, and Winfield followed her. Rose of Sharon dug at a deep eye in a potato with the point of her knife. The evening light deepened and became more blue.

Ma said, in a sharp matter-of-fact tone, “I don’ see why him savin’ Tom got to get you drunk.”

John said sadly, “Can’t say her. I feel awful. He done her so easy. Jus’ stepped up there an’ says, ‘I done her.’ An’ they took ’im away. An’ I’m a-gonna get drunk.”

Pa still nodded his head. “I don’t see why you got to tell,” he said. “If it was me, I’d jus’ go off an’ get drunk if I had to.”

“Come a time when I could a did somepin an’ took the big sin off my soul,” Uncle John said sadly. “An’ I slipped up. I didn’ jump on her, an’—an’ she got away. Lookie!” he said. “You got the money. Gimme two dollars.”

Pa reached reluctantly into his pocket and brought out the leather pouch. “You ain’t gonna need no seven dollars to get drunk. You don’t need to drink champagny water.”

Uncle John held out his bill. “You take this here an’ gimme two dollars. I can get good an’ drunk for two dollars. I don’ want no sin of waste on me. I’ll spend whatever I got. Always do.”

Pa took the dirty bill and gave Uncle John two silver dollars. “There ya are,” he said. “A fella got to do what he got to do. Nobody don’ know enough to tell ’im.”

Uncle John took the coins. “You ain’t gonna be mad? You know I got to?”

“Christ, yes,” said Pa. “You know what you got to do.”

“I wouldn’ be able to get through this night no other way,” he said. He turned to Ma. “You ain’t gonna hold her over me?”

Ma didn’t look up. “No,” she said softly. “No—you go ’long.”

He stood up and walked forlornly away in the evening. He walked up to the concrete highway and across the pavement to the grocery store. In front of the screen door he took off his hat, dropped it into the dust, and ground it with his heel in self-abasement. And he left his black hat there, broken and dirty. He entered the store and walked to the shelves where the whisky bottles stood behind wire netting.

Pa and Ma and the children watched Uncle John move away. Rose of Sharon kept her eyes resentfully on the potatoes.

“Poor John,” Ma said. “I wondered if it would a done any good if —no—I guess not. I never seen a man so drove.”

Ruthie turned on her side in the dust. She put her head close to Winfield’s head and pulled his ear against her mouth. She whispered, “I’m gonna get drunk.” Winfield snorted and pinched his mouth tight. The two children crawled away, holding their breath, their faces purple with the pressure of their giggles. They crawled around the tent and leaped up and ran squealing away from the tent. They ran to the willows, and once concealed, they shrieked with laughter. Ruthie crossed her eyes and loosened her joints; she

staggered about, tripping loosely, with her tongue hanging out. “I’m drunk,” she said.

“Look,” Winfield cried. “Looka me, here’s me, an’ I’m Uncle John.” He flapped his arms and puffed, he whirled until he was dizzy.

“No,” said Ruthie. “Here’s the way. Here’s the way. *I’m* Uncle John. I’m awful drunk.”

Al and Tom walked quietly through the willows, and they came on the children staggering crazily about. The dusk was thick now. Tom stopped and peered. “Ain’t that Ruthie an’ Winfiel’? What the hell’s the matter with ’em?” They walked nearer. “You crazy?” Tom asked.

The children stopped, embarrassed. “We was—jus’ playin’,” Ruthie said.

“It’s a crazy way to play,” said Al.

Ruthie said pertly, “It ain’t no crazier’n a lot of things.”

Al walked on. He said to Tom, “Ruthie’s workin’ up a kick in the pants. She been workin’ it up a long time. ’Bout due for it.”

Ruthie mushed her face at his back, pulled out her mouth with her forefingers, slobbered her tongue at him, outraged him in every way she knew, but Al did not turn back to look at her. She looked at Winfield again to start the game, but it had been spoiled. They both knew it.

“Le’s go down the water an’ duck our heads,” Winfield suggested. They walked down through the willows, and they were angry at Al.

Al and Tom went quietly in the dusk. Tom said, “Casy shouldn’ of did it. I might of knew, though. He was talkin’ how he ain’t done nothin’ for us. He’s a funny fella, Al. All the time thinkin’.”

“Comes from bein’ a preacher,” Al said. “They get all messed up with stuff.”

“Where ya s’pose Connie was a-goin’?”

“Goin’ to take a crap, I guess.”

“Well, he was goin’ a hell of a long way.”

They walked among the tents, keeping close to the walls. At Floyd’s tent a soft hail stopped them. They came near to the tent flap and squatted down. Floyd raised the canvas a little. “You gettin’ out?”

Tom said, “I don’ know. Think we better?”

Floyd laughed sourly. “You heard what that bull said. They’ll burn ya out if ya don’t. ’F you think that guy’s gonna take a beat in’ ’thout gettin’ back, you’re nuts. The pool-room boys’ll be down here tonight to burn us out.”

“Guess we better git, then,” Tom said. “Where you a-goin’?”

“Why, up north, like I said.”

Al said, “Look, a fella tol’ me ’bout a gov’ment camp near here. Where’s it at?”

“Oh, I think that’s full up.”

“Well, where’s it at?”

“Go south on 99’bout twelve-fourteen miles, an’ turn east to Weed-patch. It’s right near there. But I think she’s full up.”

“Fella says it’s nice,” Al said.

“Sure, she’s nice. Treat ya like a man ’stead of a dog. Ain’t no cops there. But she’s full up.”

Tom said, “What I can’t understan’s why that cop was so mean. Seemed like he was aimin’ for trouble; seemed like he’s pokin’ a fella to make trouble.”

Floyd said, “I don’ know about here, but up north I knowed one a them fellas, an’ he was a nice fella. He tol’ me up there the deputies got to take guys in. Sheriff gets seventy-five cents a day for each prisoner, an’ he feeds ’em for a quarter. If he ain’t got prisoners, he don’t make no profit. This fella says he didn’ pick up nobody for a week, an’ the sheriff tol’ ’im he better bring in guys or give up his button. This fella today sure looks like he’s out to make a pinch one way or another.”

“We got to get on,” said Tom. “So long, Floyd.”

“So long. Prob’ly see you. Hope so.”

“Good-by,” said Al. They walked through the dark gray camp to the Joad tent.

The frying pan of potatoes was hissing and spitting over the fire. Ma moved the thick slices about with a spoon. Pa sat near by, hugging his knees. Rose of Sharon was sitting under the tarpaulin.

“It’s Tom!” Ma cried. “Thank God.”

“We got to get outa here,” said Tom.

“What’s the matter now?”

“Well, Floyd says they’ll burn the camp tonight.”

“What the hell for?” Pa asked. “We ain’t done nothin’.”

“Nothin’ ’cept beat up a cop,” said Tom.

“Well, we never done it.”

“From what that cop said, they wanta push us along.”

Rose of Sharon demanded, “You seen Connie?”

“Yeah,” said Al. “Way to hell an’ gone up the river. He’s goin’ south.”

“Was—was he goin’ away?”

“I don’ know.”

Ma turned on the girl. “Rosasharn, you been talkin’ an’ actin’ funny. What’d Connie say to you?”

Rose of Sharon said sullenly, “Said it would a been a good thing if he stayed home an’ studied up tractors.”

They were very quiet. Rose of Sharon looked at the fire and her eyes glistened in the firelight. The potatoes hissed sharply in the frying pan. The girl sniffled and wiped her nose with the back of her hand.

Pa said, “Connie wasn’ no good. I seen that a long time. Didn’ have no guts, jus’ too big for his overhalls.”

Rose of Sharon got up and went into the tent. She lay down on the mattress and rolled over on her stomach and buried her head in her crossed arms.

“Wouldn’ do no good to catch ’im, I guess,” Al said.

Pa replied, “No. If he ain’t no good, we don’ want him.”

Ma looked into the tent, where Rose of Sharon lay on her mattress. Ma said, “Sh. Don’ say that.”

“Well, he ain’t no good,” Pa insisted. “All the time a-sayin’ what he’s a-gonna do. Never doin’ nothin’. I didn’ want ta say nothin’ while he’s here. But now he’s run out——”

“Sh!” Ma said softly.

“Why, for Christ’s sake? Why do I got to shh? He run out, didn’ he?”

Ma turned over the potatoes with her spoon, and the grease boiled and spat. She fed twigs to the fire, and the flames laced up and lighted the tent. Ma said, “Rosasharn gonna have a little fella an’ that baby is half Connie. It ain’t good for a baby to grow up

with folks a-sayin' his pa ain't no good."

"Better'n lyin' about it," said Pa.

"No, it ain't," Ma interrupted. "Make out like he's dead. You wouldn' say no bad things about Connie if he's dead."

Tom broke in, "Hey, what is this? We ain't sure Connie's gone for good. We got no time for talkin'. We got to eat an' get on our way."

"On our way? We jus' come here." Ma peered at him through the firelighted darkness.

He explained carefully, "They gonna burn the camp tonight, Ma. Now you know I ain't got it in me to stan' by an' see our stuff burn up, nor Pa ain't got it in him, nor Uncle John. We'd come up a-fightin', an' I jus' can't afford to be took in an' mugged. I nearly got it today, if the preacher hadn' jumped in."

Ma had been turning the frying potatoes in the hot grease. Now she took her decision. "Come on!" she cried. "Le's eat this stuff. We got to go quick." She set out the tin plates.

Pa said, "How 'bout John?"

"Where is Uncle John?" Tom asked.

Pa and Ma were silent for a moment, and then Pa said, "He went to get drunk."

"Jesus!" Tom said. "What a time he picked out! Where'd he go?"

"I don' know," said Pa.

Tom stood up. "Look," he said, "you all eat an' get the stuff loaded. I'll go look for Uncle John. He'd of went to the store 'crost the road."

Tom walked quickly away. The little cooking fires burned in front of the tents and the shacks, and the light fell on the faces of ragged men and women, on crouched children. In a few tents the light of kerosene lamps shone through the canvas and placed shadows of people hugely on the cloth.

Tom walked up the dusty road and crossed the concrete highway to the little grocery store. He stood in front of the screen door and looked in. The proprietor, a little gray man with an unkempt mustache and watery eyes, leaned on the counter reading a newspaper. His thin arms were bare and he wore a long white apron. Heaped around and in back of him were mounds, pyramids, walls of canned goods. He looked up when Tom came in, and his eyes narrowed as though he aimed a shotgun.

“Good evening,” he said. “Run out of something?”

“Run out of my uncle,” said Tom, “Or he run out, or something.”

The gray man looked puzzled and worried at the same time. He touched the tip of his nose tenderly and waggled it around to stop an itch. “Seems like you people always lost somebody,” he said. “Ten times a day or more somebody comes in here an’ says, ‘If you see a man named so an’ so, an’ looks like so an’ so, will you tell ’im we went up north?’ Somepin like that all the time.”

Tom laughed. “Well, if you see a young snot-nose name’ Connie, looks a little bit like a coyote, tell ’im to go to hell. We’ve went south. But he ain’t the fella I’m lookin’ for. Did a fella ’bout sixty years ol’, black pants, sort of grayish hair, come in here an’ get some whisky?”

The eyes of the gray man brightened. “Now he sure did. I never seen anything like it. He stood out front an’ he dropped his hat an’ stepped on it. Here, I got his hat here.” He brought the dusty broken hat from under the counter.

Tom took it from him. “That’s him, all right.”

“Well, sir, he got couple pints of whisky an’ he didn’ say a thing. He pulled the cork an’ tipped up the bottle. I ain’t got a license to drink here. I says, ‘Look, you can’t drink here. You got to go outside.’ Well, sir! He jus’ stepped outside the door, an’ I bet he didn’t tilt up that pint more’n four times till it was empty. He throwed it away an’ he leaned in the door. Eyes kinda dull. He says, ‘Thank you, sir,’ an’ he went on. I never seen no drinkin’ like that in my life.”

“Went on? Which way? I got to get him.”

“Well, it so happens I can tell you. I never seen such drinkin’, so I looked out after him. He went north; an’ then a car come along an’ lighted him up, an’ he went down the bank. Legs was beginnin’ to buckle a little. He got the other pint open awready. He won’t be far —not the way he was goin’.”

Tom said, “Thank ya. I got to find him.”

“You want ta take his hat?”

“Yeah! Yeah! He’ll need it. Well, thank ya.”

“What’s the matter with him?” the gray man asked. “He wasn’t takin’ pleasure in his drink.”

“Oh, he’s kinda—moody. Well, good night. An’ if you see that

squirt Connie, tell 'im we've went south."

"I got so many people to look out for an' tell stuff to, I can't ever remember 'em all."

"Don't put yourself out too much," Tom said. He went out the screen door carrying Uncle John's dusty black hat. He crossed the concrete road and walked along the edge of it. Below him in the sunken field, the Hooverville lay; and the little fires flickered and the lanterns shone through the tents. Somewhere in the camp a guitar sounded, slow chords, struck without any sequence, practice chords. Tom stopped and listened, and then he moved slowly along the side of the road, and every few steps he stopped to listen again. He had gone a quarter of a mile before he heard what he listened for. Down below the embankment the sound of a thick, tuneless voice, singing drably. Tom cocked his head, the better to hear.

And the dull voice sang, "I've give my heart to Jesus, so Jesus take me home. I've give my soul to Jesus, so Jesus is my home." The song trailed off to a murmur, and then stopped. Tom hurried down from the embankment, toward the song. After a while he stopped and listened again. And the voice was close this time, the same slow, tuneless singing, "Oh, the night that Maggie died, she called me to her side, an' give to me them ol' red flannel drawers that Maggie wore. They was baggy at the knees——"

Tom moved cautiously forward. He saw the black form sitting on the ground, and he stole near and sat down. Uncle John tilted the pint and the liquor gurgled out of the neck of the bottle.

Tom said quietly, "Hey, wait! Where do I come in?"

Uncle John turned his head. "Who you?"

"You forgot me awready? You had four drinks to my one."

"No, Tom. Don' try fool me. I'm all alone here. You ain't been here."

"Well, I'm sure here now. How 'bout givin' me a snort?"

Uncle John raised the pint again and the whisky gurgled. He shook the bottle. It was empty. "No more," he said. "Wanta die so bad. Wanta die awful. Die a little bit. Got to. Like sleepin'. Die a little bit. So tar'd. Tar'd. Maybe—don' wake up no more." His voice crooned off. "Gonna wear a crown—a golden crown."

Tom said, "Listen here to me, Uncle John. We're gonna move on. You come along, an' you can go right to sleep up on the load."

John shook his head. “No. Go on. Ain’t goin’. Gonna res’ here. No good goin’ back. No good to nobody—jus’ a-draggin’ my sins like dirty drawers ’mongst nice folks. No. Ain’t goin’.”

“Come on. We can’t go ’less you go.”

“Go ri’ ’long. I ain’t no good. I ain’t no good. Jus’ a-draggin’ my sins, a-dirtyin’ ever’body.”

“You got no more sin’n anybody else.”

John put his head close, and he winked one eye wisely. Tom could see his face dimly in the starlight. “Nobody don’ know my sins, nobody but Jesus. He knows.”

Tom got down on his knees. He put his hand on Uncle John’s forehead, and it was hot and dry. John brushed his hand away clumsily.

“Come on,” Tom pleaded. “Come on now, Uncle John.”

“Ain’t goin’ go. Jus’ tar’d. Gon’ res’ ri’ here. Ri’ here.”

Tom was very close. He put his fist against the point of Uncle John’s chin. He made a small practice arc twice, for distance; and then, with his shoulder in the swing, he hit the chin a delicate perfect blow. John’s chin snapped up and he fell backwards and tried to sit up again. But Tom was kneeling over him and as John got one elbow up Tom hit him again. Uncle John lay still on the ground.

Tom stood up and, bending, he lifted the loose sagging body and boosted it over his shoulder. He staggered under the loose weight. John’s hanging hands tapped him on the back as he went, slowly, puffing up the bank to the highway. Once a car came by and lighted him with the limp man over his shoulder. The car slowed for a moment and then roared away.

Tom was panting when he came back to the Hooverville, down from the road and to the Joad truck. John was coming to; he struggled weakly. Tom set him gently down on the ground.

Camp had been broken while he was gone. Al passed the bundles up on the truck. The tarpaulin lay ready to bind over the load.

Al said, “He sure got a quick start.”

Tom apologized. “I had to hit ’im a little to make ’im come. Poor fella.”

“Didn’ hurt ’im?” Ma asked.

“Don’ think so. He’s a-comin’ out of it.”

Uncle John was weakly sick on the ground. His spasms of vomiting came in little gasps.

Ma said, “I lef’ a plate a potatoes for you, Tom.”

Tom chuckled. “I ain’t just in the mood right now.”

Pa called, “Awright, Al. Sling up the tarp.”

The truck was loaded and ready. Uncle John had gone to sleep. Tom and Al boosted and pulled him up on the load while Winfield made a vomiting noise behind the truck and Ruthie plugged her mouth with her hand to keep from squealing.

“Awready,” Pa said.

Tom asked, “Where’s Rosasharn?”

“Over there,” said Ma. “Come on, Rosasharn. We’re a-goin’.”

The girl sat still, her chin sunk on her breast. Tom walked over to her. “Come on,” he said.

“I ain’t a-goin’.” She did not raise her head.

“You got to go.”

“I want Connie. I ain’t a-goin’ till he comes back.”

Three cars pulled out of the camp, up the road to the highway, old cars loaded with the camps and the people. They clanked up to the highway and rolled away, their dim lights glancing along the road.

Tom said, “Connie’ll find us. I lef’ word up at the store where we’d be. He’ll find us.”

Ma came up and stood beside him. “Come on, Rosasharn. Come on, honey,” she said gently.

“I wanta wait.”

“We can’t wait.” Ma leaned down and took the girl by the arm and helped her to her feet.

“He’ll find us,” Tom said. “Don’ you worry. He’ll find us.” They walked on either side of the girl.

“Maybe he went to get them books to study up,” said Rose of Sharon. “Maybe he was a-gonna surprise us.”

Ma said, “Maybe that’s jus’ what he done.” They led her to the truck and helped her up on top of the load, and she crawled under the tarpaulin and disappeared into the dark cave.

Now the bearded man from the weed shack came timidly to the truck. He waited about, his hands clutched behind his back. “You gonna leave any stuff a fella could use?” he asked at last.

Pa said, “Can’t think of nothin’. We ain’t got nothin’ to leave.”

Tom asked, “Ain’t ya gettin’ out?”

For a long time the bearded man stared at him. “No,” he said at last.

“But they’ll burn ya out.”

The unsteady eyes dropped to the ground. “I know. They done it before.”

“Well, why the hell don’t ya get out?”

The bewildered eyes looked up for a moment, and then down again, and the dying firelight was reflected redly. “I don’ know. Takes so long to git stuff together.”

“You won’t have nothin’ if they burn ya out.”

“I know. You ain’t leavin’ nothin’ a fella could use?”

“Cleaned out, slick,” said Pa. The bearded man vaguely wandered away. “What’s a matter with him?” Pa demanded.

“Cop-happy,” said Tom. “Fella was sayin’—he’s bull-simple. Been beat over the head too much.”

A second little caravan drove past the camp and climbed to the road and moved away.

“Come on, Pa. Let’s go. Look here, Pa. You an’ me an’ Al ride in the seat. Ma can get on the load. No. Ma, you ride in the middle. Al”—Tom reached under the seat and brought out a big monkey wrench—“Al, you get up behind. Take this here. Jus’ in case. If anybody tries to climb up—let ’im have it.”

Al took the wrench and climbed up the back board, and he settled himself cross-legged, the wrench in his hand. Tom pulled the iron jack handle from under the seat and laid it on the floor, under the brake pedal. “Awright,” he said. “Get in the middle, Ma.”

Pa said, “I ain’t got nothin’ in my han’.”

“You can reach over an’ get the jack handle,” said Tom. “I hope to Jesus you don’ need it.” He stepped on the starter and the clanking flywheel turned over, the engine caught and died, and caught again. Tom turned on the lights and moved out of the camp in low gear. The dim lights fingered the road nervously. They

climbed up to the highway and turned south. Tom said, “They comes a time when a man gets mad.”

Ma broke in, “Tom—you tol’ me—you promised me you wasn’t like that. You promised.”

“I know, Ma. I’m a-tryin’. But them deputies—Did you ever see a deputy that didn’ have a fat ass? An’ they waggle their ass an’ flop their gun aroun’. Ma,” he said, “if it was the law they was workin’ with, why, we could take it. But it *ain’t* the law. They’re a-workin’ away at our spirits. They’re a-tryin’ to make us cringe an’ crawl like a whipped bitch. They tryin’ to break us. Why, Jesus Christ, Ma, they comes a time when the on’y way a fella can keep his decency is by takin’ a sock at a cop. They’re workin’ on our decency.”

Ma said, “You promised, Tom. That’s how Pretty Boy Floyd done. I knowed his ma. They hurt him.”

“I’m a-tryin’, Ma. Honest to God, I am. You don’ want me to crawl like a beat bitch, with my belly on the groun’, do you?”

“I’m a-prayin’. You got to keep clear, Tom. The fambly’s breakin’ up. You got to keep clear.”

“I’ll try, Ma. But when one a them fat asses gets to workin’ me over, I got a big job tryin’. If it was the law, it’d be different. But burnin’ the camp ain’t the law.”

The car jolted along. Ahead, a little row of red lanterns stretched across the highway.

“Detour, I guess,” Tom said. He slowed the car and stopped it, and immediately a crowd of men swarmed about the truck. They were armed with pick handles and shotguns. They wore trench helmets and some American Legion caps. One man leaned in the window, and the warm smell of whisky preceded him.

“Where you think you’re goin’?” He thrust a red face near to Tom’s face.

Tom stiffened. His hand crept down to the floor and felt for the jack handle. Ma caught his arm and held it powerfully. Tom said, “Well—” and then his voice took on a servile whine. “We’re strangers here,” he said. “We heard about they’s work in a place called Tulare.”

“Well, goddamn it, you’re goin’ the wrong way. We ain’t gonna have no goddamn Okies in this town.”

Tom’s shoulders and arms were rigid, and a shiver went through

him. Ma clung to his arm. The front of the truck was surrounded by the armed men. Some of them, to make a military appearance, wore tunics and Sam Browne belts.

Tom whined, “Which way is it at, mister?”

“You turn right around an’ head north. An’ don’t come back till the cotton’s ready.”

Tom shivered all over. “Yes, sir,” he said. He put the car in reverse, backed around and turned. He headed back the way he had come. Ma released his arm and patted him softly. And Tom tried to restrain his hard smothered sobbing.

“Don’ you mind,” Ma said. “Don’ you mind.”

Tom blew his nose out the window and wiped his eyes on his sleeve. “The sons-of-bitches——”

“You done good,” Ma said tenderly. “You done jus’ good.”

Tom swerved into a side dirt road, ran a hundred yards, and turned off his lights and motor. He got out of the car, carrying the jack handle.

“Where you goin’?” Ma demanded.

“Jus’ gonna look. We ain’t goin’ north.” The red lanterns moved up the highway. Tom watched them cross the entrance of the dirt road and continue on. In a few moments there came the sounds of shouts and screams, and then a flaring light arose from the direction of the Hooverville. The light grew and spread, and from the distance came a crackling sound. Tom got in the truck again. He turned around and ran up the dirt road without lights. At the highway he turned south again, and he turned on his lights.

Ma asked timidly, “Where we goin’, Tom?”

“Goin’ south,” he said. “We couldn’ let them bastards push us aroun’. We couldn’. Try to get aroun’ the town ’thout goin’ through it.”

“Yeah, but where we goin’?” Pa spoke for the first time. “That’s what I want ta know.”

“Gonna look for that gov’ment camp,” Tom said. “A fella said they don’ let no deputies in there. Ma—I got to get away from ’em. I’m scairt I’ll kill one.”

“Easy, Tom.” Ma soothed him. “Easy, Tommy. You done good once. You can do it again.”

“Yeah, an’ after a while I won’t have no decency lef’.”

“Easy,” she said. “You got to have patience. Why, Tom—us people will go on livin’ when all them people is gone. Why, Tom, we’re the people that live. They ain’t gonna wipe us out. Why, we’re the people—we go on.”

“We take a beatin’ all the time.”

“I know.” Ma chuckled. “Maybe that makes us tough. Rich fellas come up an’ they die, an’ their kids ain’t no good, an’ they die out. But, Tom, we keep a-comin’. Don’ you fret none, Tom. A different time’s comin’.”

“How do you know?”

“I don’ know how.”

They entered the town and Tom turned down a side street to avoid the center. By the street lights he looked at his mother. Her face was quiet and a curious look was in her eyes, eyes like the timeless eyes of a statue. Tom put out his right hand and touched her on the shoulder. He had to. And then he withdrew his hand. “Never heard you talk so much in my life,” he said.

“Wasn’t never so much reason,” she said.

He drove through the side streets and cleared the town, and then he crossed back. At an intersection the sign said “99.” He turned south on it.

“Well, anyways they never shoved us north,” he said. “We still go where we want, even if we got to crawl for the right.”

The dim lights felt along the broad black highway ahead.

Chapter 21

The moving, questing people were migrants now. Those families which had lived on a little piece of land, who had lived and died on forty acres, had eaten or starved on the produce of forty acres, had now the whole West to rove in. And they scampered about, looking for work; and the highways were streams of people, and the ditch banks were lines of people. Behind them more were coming. The great highways streamed with moving people. There in the Middle- and Southwest had lived a simple agrarian folk who had not changed with industry, who had not formed with machines or known the power and danger of machines in private hands. They had not grown up in the paradoxes of industry. Their senses were still sharp to the ridiculousness of the industrial life.

And then suddenly the machines pushed them out and they swarmed on the highways. The movement changed them; the highways, the camps along the road, the fear of hunger and the hunger itself, changed them. The children without dinner changed them, the endless moving changed them. They were migrants. And the hostility changed them, welded them, united them—hostility that made the little towns group and arm as though to repel an invader, squads with pick handles, clerks and storekeepers with shotguns, guarding the world against their own people.

In the West there was panic when the migrants multiplied on the highways. Men of property were terrified for their property. Men who had never been hungry saw the eyes of the hungry. Men who had never wanted anything very much saw the flare of want in the eyes of the migrants. And the men of the towns and of the soft suburban country gathered to defend themselves; and they reassured themselves that they were good and the invaders bad, as a man must do before he fights. They said, These goddamned Okies are dirty and ignorant. They're degenerate, sexual maniacs. These goddamned Okies are thieves. They'll steal anything. They've got no sense of property rights.

And the latter was true, for how can a man without property know the ache of ownership? And the defending people said, They bring disease, they're filthy. We can't have them, in the schools. They're strangers. How'd you like to have your sister go out with

one of 'em?

The local people whipped themselves into a mold of cruelty. Then they formed units, squads, and armed them—armed them with clubs, with gas, with guns. We own the country. We can't let these Okies get out of hand. And the men who were armed did not own the land, but they thought they did. And the clerks who drilled at night owned nothing, and the little storekeepers possessed only a drawerful of debts. But even a debt is something, even a job is something. The clerk thought, I get fifteen dollars a week. S'pose a goddamn Okie would work for twelve? And the little storekeeper thought, How could I compete with a debtless man?

And the migrants streamed in on the highways and their hunger was in their eyes, and their need was in their eyes. They had no argument, no system, nothing but their numbers and their needs. When there was work for a man, ten men fought for it—fought with a low wage. If that fella'll work for thirty cents, I'll work for twenty-five.

If he'll take twenty-five, I'll do it for twenty.

No, me, I'm hungry. I'll work for fifteen. I'll work for food. The kids. You ought to see them. Little boils, like, comin' out, an' they can't run aroun'. Give 'em some windfall fruit, an' they bloated up. Me. I'll work for a little piece of meat.

And this was good, for wages went down and prices stayed up. The great owners were glad and they sent out more handbills to bring more people in. And wages went down and prices stayed up. And pretty soon now we'll have serfs again.

And now the great owners and the companies invented a new method. A great owner bought a cannery. And when the peaches and the pears were ripe he cut the price of fruit below the cost of raising it. And as cannery owner he paid himself a low price for the fruit and kept the price of canned goods up and took his profit. And the little farmers who owned no canneries lost their farms, and they were taken by the great owners, the banks, and the companies who also owned the canneries. As time went on, there were fewer farms. The little farmers moved into town for a while and exhausted their credit, exhausted their friends, their relatives. And then they too went on the highways. And the roads were crowded with men ravenous for work, murderous for work.

And the companies, the banks worked at their own doom and

they did not know it. The fields were fruitful, and starving men moved on the roads. The granaries were full and the children of the poor grew up rachitic, and the pustules of pellagra swelled on their sides. The great companies did not know that the line between hunger and anger is a thin line. And money that might have gone to wages went for gas, for guns, for agents and spies, for blacklists, for drilling. On the highways the people moved like ants and searched for work, for food. And the anger began to ferment.

Chapter 22

It was late when Tom Joad drove along a country road looking for the Weedpatch camp. There were few lights in the countryside. Only a sky glare behind showed the direction of Bakersfield. The truck jiggled slowly along and hunting cats left the road ahead of it. At a crossroad there was a little cluster of white wooden buildings.

Ma was sleeping in the seat and Pa had been silent and withdrawn for a long time.

Tom said, “I don’ know where she is. Maybe we’ll wait till daylight an’ ast somebody.” He stopped at a boulevard signal and another car stopped at the crossing. Tom leaned out. “Hey, mister. Know where the big camp is at?”

“Straight ahead.”

Tom pulled across into the opposite road. A few hundred yards, and then he stopped. A high wire fence faced the road, and a wide-gated driveway turned in. A little way inside the gate there was a small house with a light in the window. Tom turned in. The whole truck leaped into the air and crashed down again.

“Jesus!” Tom said. “I didn’ even see that hump.”

A watchman stood up from the porch and walked to the car. He leaned on the side. “You hit her too fast,” he said. “Next time you’ll take it easy.”

“What is it, for God’s sake?”

The watchman laughed. “Well, a lot of kids play in here. You tell folks to go slow and they’re liable to forget. But let ’em hit that hump once and they don’t forget.”

“Oh! Yeah. Hope I didn’ break nothin’. Say—you got any room here for us?”

“Got one camp. How many of you?”

Tom counted on his fingers. “Me an’ Pa an’ Ma, Al an’ Rosasharn an’ Uncle John an’ Ruthie an’ Winfiel’. Them last is kids.”

“Well, I guess we can fix you. Got any camping stuff?”

“Got a big tarp an’ beds.”

The watchman stepped up on the running board. “Drive down the end of that line an’ turn right. You’ll be in Number Four Sanitary

Unit."

"What's that?"

"Toilets and showers and wash tubs."

Ma demanded, "You got wash tubs—running water?"

"Sure."

"Oh! Praise God," said Ma.

Tom drove down the long dark row of tents. In the sanitary building a low light burned. "Pull in here," the watchman said. "It's a nice place. Folks that had it just moved out."

Tom stopped the car. "Right there?"

"Yeah. Now you let the others unload while I sign you up. Get to sleep. The camp committee'll call on you in the morning and get you fixed up."

Tom's eyes drew down. "Cops?" he asked.

The watchman laughed. "No cops. We got our own cops. Folks here elect their own cops. Come along."

Al dropped off the truck and walked around. "Gonna stay here?"

"Yeah," said Tom. "You an' Pa unload while I go to the office."

"Be kinda quiet," the watchman said. "They's a lot of folks sleeping."

Tom followed through the dark and climbed the office steps and entered a tiny room containing an old desk and a chair. The guard sat down at the desk and took out a form.

"Name?"

"Tom Joad."

"That your father?"

"Yeah."

"His name?"

"Tom Joad, too."

The questions went on. Where from, how long in the State, what work done. The watchman looked up. "I'm not nosy. We got to have this stuff."

"Sure," said Tom.

"Now—got any money?"

"Little bit."

"You ain't destitute?"

“Got a little. Why?”

“Well, the camp site costs a dollar a week, but you can work it out, carrying garbage, keeping the camp clean—stuff like that.”

“We’ll work it out,” said Tom.

“You’ll see the committee tomorrow. They’ll show you how to use the camp and tell you the rules.”

Tom said, “Say—what is this? What committee is this, anyways?”

The watchman settled himself back. “Works pretty nice. There’s five sanitary units. Each one elects a Central Committee man. Now that committee makes the laws. What they say goes.”

“S’pose they get tough,” Tom said.

“Well, you can vote ’em out jus’ as quick as you vote ’em in. They’ve done a fine job. Tell you what they did—you know the Holy Roller preachers all the time follow the people around, preachin’ an’ takin’ up collections? Well, they wanted to preach in this camp. And a lot of the older folks wanted them. So it was up to the Central Committee. They went into meeting and here’s how they fixed it. They say, ‘Any preacher can preach in this camp. Nobody can take up a collection in this camp.’ And it was kinda sad for the old folks, ’cause there hasn’t been a preacher in since.”

Tom laughed and then he asked, “You mean to say the fellas that runs the camp is jus’ fellas—campin’ here?”

“Sure. And it works.”

“You said about cops——”

“Central Committee keeps order an’ makes rules. Then there’s the ladies. They’ll call on your ma. They keep care of kids an’ look after the sanitary units. If your ma isn’t working, she’ll look after kids for the ones that is working, an’ when she gets a job—why, there’ll be others. They sew, and a nurse comes out an’ teaches ’em. All kinds of things like that.”

“You mean to say they ain’t no cops?”

“No, sir. No cop can come in here without a warrant.”

“Well, s’pose a fella is jus’ mean, or drunk an’ quarrelsome. What then?”

The watchman stabbed the blotter with a pencil. “Well, the first time the Central Committee warns him. And the second time they really warn him. The third time they kick him out of the camp.”

“God Almighty, I can’t hardly believe it! Tonight the deputies an’ them fellas with the little caps, they burned the camp out by the river.”

“They don’t get in here,” the watchman said. “Some nights the boys patrol the fences, ’specially dance nights.”

“Dance nights? Jesus Christ!”

“We got the best dances in the county every Saturday night.”

“Well, for Christ’s sake! Why ain’t they more places like this?”

The watchman looked sullen. “You’ll have to find that out yourself. Go get some sleep.”

“Good night,” said Tom. “Ma’s gonna like this place. She ain’t been treated decent for a long time.”

“Good night,” the watchman said. “Get some sleep. This camp wakes up early.”

Tom walked down the street between the rows of tents. His eyes grew used to the starlight. He saw that the rows were straight and that there was no litter about the tents. The ground of the street had been swept and sprinkled. From the tents came the snores of sleeping people. The whole camp buzzed and snorted. Tom walked slowly. He neared Number Four Sanitary Unit and he looked at it curiously, an unpainted building, low and rough. Under a roof, but open at the sides, the rows of wash trays. He saw the Joad truck standing near by, and went quietly toward it. The tarpaulin was pitched and the camp was quiet. As he drew near a figure moved from the shadow of the truck and came toward him.

Ma said softly, “That you, Tom?”

“Yeah.”

“Sh!” she said. “They’re all asleep. They was tar’d out.”

“You ought to be asleep too,” Tom said.

“Well, I wanted to see ya. Is it awright?”

“It’s nice,” Tom said. “I ain’t gonna tell ya. They’ll tell ya in the mornin’. Ya gonna like it.”

She whispered, “I heard they got hot water.”

“Yeah. Now you get to sleep. I don’ know when you slep’ las’.”

She begged, “What ain’t you a-gonna tell me?”

“I ain’t. You get to sleep.”

Suddenly she seemed girlish. “How can I sleep if I got to think

about what you ain't gonna tell me?"

"No, you don't," Tom said. "First thing in the mornin' you get on your other dress an' then—you'll find out."

"I can't sleep with nothin' like that hangin' over me."

"You got to," Tom chuckled happily. "You jus' got to."

"Good night," she said softly; and she bent down and slipped under the dark tarpaulin.

Tom climbed up over the tail-board of the truck. He lay down on his back on the wooden floor and he pillowed his head on his crossed hands, and his forearms pressed against his ears. The night grew cooler. Tom buttoned his coat over his chest and settled back again. The stars were clear and sharp over his head.

It was still dark when he awakened. A small clashing noise brought him up from sleep. Tom listened and heard again the squeak of iron on iron. He moved stiffly and shivered in the morning air. The camp still slept. Tom stood up and looked over the side of the truck. The eastern mountains were blue-black, and as he watched, the light stood up faintly behind them, colored at the mountain rims with a washed red, then growing colder, grayer, darker, as it went up overhead, until at a place near the western horizon it merged with pure night. Down in the valley the earth was the lavender-gray of dawn.

The clash of iron sounded again. Tom looked down the line of tents, only a little lighter gray than the ground. Beside a tent he saw a flash of orange fire seeping from the cracks in an old iron stove. Gray smoke spurted up from a stubby smoke-pipe.

Tom climbed over the truck side and dropped to the ground. He moved slowly toward the stove. He saw a girl working about the stove, saw that she carried a baby on her crooked arm, and that the baby was nursing, its head up under the girl's shirtwaist. And the girl moved about, poking the fire, shifting the rusty stove lids to make a better draft, opening the oven door; and all the time the baby sucked, and the mother shifted it deftly from arm to arm. The baby didn't interfere with her work or with the quick gracefulness of her movements. And the orange fire licked out of the stove cracks and threw flickering reflections on the tent.

Tom moved closer. He smelled frying bacon and baking bread.

From the east the light grew swiftly. Tom came near to the stove and stretched out his hands to it. The girl looked at him and nodded, so that her two braids jerked.

"Good mornin'," she said, and she turned the bacon in the pan.

The tent flap jerked up and a young man came out and an older man followed him. They were dressed in new blue dungarees and in dungaree coats, stiff with filler, the brass buttons shining. They were sharp-faced men, and they looked much alike. The younger man had a dark stubble beard and the older man a white stubble beard. Their heads and faces were wet, their hair dripped, water stood in drops on their stiff beards. Their cheeks shone with dampness. Together they stood looking quietly into the lightening east. They yawned together and watched the light on the hill rims. And then they turned and saw Tom.

"Mornin'," the older man said, and his face was neither friendly nor unfriendly.

"Mornin'," said Tom.

And, "Mornin'," said the younger man.

The water slowly dried on their faces. They came to the stove and warmed their hands at it.

The girl kept to her work. Once she set the baby down and tied her braids together in back with a string, and the two braids jerked and swung as she worked. She set tin cups on a big packing box, set tin plates and knives and forks out. Then she scooped bacon from the deep grease and laid it on a tin platter, and the bacon cricked and rustled as it grew crisp. She opened the rusty oven door and took out a square pan full of big high biscuits.

When the smell of the biscuits struck the air both of the men inhaled deeply. The younger said, "Kee-rist!" softly.

Now the older man said to Tom, "Had your breakfast?"

"Well, no, I ain't. But my folks is over there. They ain't up. Need the sleep."

"Well, set down with us, then. We got plenty—thank God!"

"Why, thank ya," Tom said. "Smells so darn good I couldn' say no."

"Don't she?" the younger man asked. "Ever smell anything so good in ya life?" They marched to the packing box and squatted around it.

“Workin’ around here?” the young man asked.

“Aim to,” said Tom. “We jus’ got in las’ night. Ain’t had no chance to look aroun’.”

“We had twelve days’ work,” the young man said.

The girl, working by the stove, said, “They even got new clothes.” Both men looked down at their stiff blue clothes, and they smiled a little shyly. The girl set out the platter of bacon and the brown, high biscuits and a bowl of bacon gravy and a pot of coffee, and then she squatted down by the box too. The baby still nursed, its head up under the girl’s shirtwaist.

They filled their plates, poured bacon gravy over the biscuits, and sugared their coffee.

The older man filled his mouth full, and he chewed and chewed and gulped and swallowed. “God Almighty, it’s good!” he said, and he filled his mouth again.

The younger man said, “We been eatin’ good for twelve days now. Never missed a meal in twelve days—none of us. Workin’ an’ gettin’ our pay an’ eatin’.” He fell to again, almost frantically, and refilled his plate. They drank the scalding coffee and threw the grounds to the earth and filled their cups again.

There was color in the light now, a reddish gleam. The father and son stopped eating. They were facing to the east and their faces were lighted by the dawn. The image of the mountain and the light coming over it were reflected in their eyes. And then they threw the grounds from their cups to the earth, and they stood up together.

“Got to git goin’,” the older man said.

The younger turned to Tom. “Lookie,” he said. “We’re layin’ some pipe. ’F you want to walk over with us, maybe we could get you on.”

Tom said, “Well, that’s mighty nice of you. An’ I sure thank ya for the breakfast.”

“Glad to have you,” the older man said. “We’ll try to git you workin’ if you want.”

“Ya goddamn right I want,” Tom said. “Jus’ wait a minute. I’ll tell my folks.” He hurried to the Joad tent and bent over and looked inside. In the gloom under the tarpaulin he saw the lumps of sleeping figures. But a little movement started among the bedclothes. Ruthie came wriggling out like a snake, her hair down

over her eyes and her dress wrinkled and twisted. She crawled carefully out and stood up. Her gray eyes were clear and calm from sleep, and mischief was not in them. Tom moved off from the tent and beckoned her to follow, and when he turned, she looked up at him.

"Lord God, you're growin' up," he said.

She looked away in sudden embarrassment. "Listen here," Tom said. "Don't you wake nobody up, but when they get up, you tell 'em I got a chancet at a job, an' I'm a-goin' for it. Tell Ma I et breakfas' with some neighbors. You hear that?"

Ruthie nodded and turned her head away, and her eyes were little girl's eyes. "Don't you wake 'em up," Tom cautioned. He hurried back to his new friends. And Ruthie cautiously approached the sanitary unit and peeked in the open doorway.

The two men were waiting when Tom came back. The young woman had dragged a mattress out and put the baby on it while she cleaned up the dishes.

Tom said, "I wanted to tell my folks where-at I was. They wasn't awake." The three walked down the street between the tents.

The camp had begun to come to life. At the new fires the women worked, slicing meat, kneading the dough for the morning's bread. And the men were stirring about the tents and about the automobiles. The sky was rosy now. In front of the office a lean old man raked the ground carefully. He so dragged his rake that the tine marks were straight and deep.

"You're out early, Pa," the young man said as they went by.

"Yep, yep. Got to make up my rent."

"Rent, hell!" the young man said. "He was drunk last Sat'dy night. Sung in his tent all night. Committee give him work for it." They walked along the edge of the oiled road; a row of walnut trees grew beside the way. The sun shoved its edge over the mountains.

Tom said, "Seems funny. I've et your food, an' I ain't tol' you my name—nor you ain't mentioned yours. I'm Tom Joad."

The older man looked at him, and then he smiled a little. "You ain't been out here long?"

"Hell, no! Jus' a couple days."

"I knowed it. Funny, you git outa the habit a mentionin' your name. They's so goddamn many. Jist fellas. Well, sir—I'm Timothy

Wallace, an' this here's my boy Wilkie."

"Proud to know ya," Tom said. "You been out here long?"

"Ten months," Wilkie said. "Got here right on the tail a the floods las' year. Jesus! We had *a* time, *a* time! Goddamn near starve' to death." Their feet rattled on the oiled road. A truckload of men went by, and each man was sunk into himself. Each man braced himself in the truck bed and scowled down.

"Goin' out for the Gas Company," Timothy said. "They got a nice job of it."

"I could of took our truck," Tom suggested.

"No." Timothy leaned down and picked up a green walnut. He tested it with his thumb and then shied it at a blackbird sitting on a fence wire. The bird flew up, let the nut sail under it, and then settled back on the wire and smoothed its shining black feathers with its beak.

Tom asked, "Ain't you got no car?"

Both Wallaces were silent, and Tom, looking at their faces, saw that they were ashamed.

Wilkie said, "Place we work at is on'y a mile up the road."

Timothy said angrily, "No, we ain't got no car. We sol' our car. Had to. Run outa food, run outa ever'thing. Couldn' git no job. Fellas come aroun' ever' week, buyin' cars. Come aroun', an' if you're hungry, why, they'll buy your car. An' if you're hungry enough, they don't hafta pay nothin' for it. An'—we was hungry enough. Give us ten dollars for her." He spat into the road.

Wilkie said quietly, "I was in Bakersfiel' las' week. I seen her— a-settin' in a use'-car lot—settin' right there, an' seventy-five dollars was the sign on her."

"We had to," Timothy said. "It was either us let 'em steal our car or us steal somepin from them. We ain't had to steal yet, but, goddamn it, we been close!"

Tom said, "You know, 'fore we lef' home, we heard they was plenty work out here. Seen han'bills askin' folks to come out."

"Yeah," Timothy said. "We seen 'em too. An' they ain't much work. An' wages is comin' down all a time. I git so goddamn tired jus' figgerin' how to eat."

"You got work now," Tom suggested.

“Yeah, but it ain’t gonna las’ long. Workin’ for a nice fella. Got a little place. Works ’longside of us. But, hell—it ain’t gonna las’ no time.”

Tom said, “Why in hell you gonna git me on? I’ll make it shorter. What you cuttin’ your own throat for?”

Timothy shook his head slowly. “I dunno. Got no sense, I guess. We figgered to get us each a hat. Can’t do it, I guess. There’s the place, off to the right there. Nice job, too. Gettin’ thirty cents an hour. Nice frien’ly fella to work for.”

They turned off the highway and walked down a graveled road, through a small kitchen orchard; and behind the trees they came to a small white farm house, a few shade trees, and a barn; behind the barn a vineyard and a field of cotton. As the three men walked past the house a screen door banged, and a stocky sunburned man came down the back steps. He wore a paper sun helmet, and he rolled up his sleeves as he came across the yard. His heavy sunburned eyebrows were drawn down in a scowl. His cheeks were sunburned a beef red.

“Mornin’, Mr. Thomas,” Timothy said.

“Morning.” The man spoke irritably.

Timothy said, “This here’s Tom Joad. We wondered if you could see your way to put him on?”

Thomas scowled at Tom. And then he laughed shortly, and his brows still scowled. “Oh, sure! I’ll put him on. I’ll put everybody on. Maybe I’ll get a hundred men on.”

“We jus’ thought—” Timothy began apologetically.

Thomas interrupted him. “Yes, I been thinkin’ too.” He swung around and faced them. “I’ve got some things to tell you. I been paying you thirty cents an hour—that right?”

“Why, sure, Mr. Thomas—but——”

“And I been getting thirty cents’ worth of work.” His heavy hard hands clasped each other.

“We try to give a good day of work.”

“Well, goddamn it, this morning you’re getting twenty-five cents an hour, and you take it or leave it.” The redness of his face deepened with anger.

Timothy said, “We’ve give you good work. You said so yourself.”

“I know it. But it seems like I ain’t hiring my own men any more.” He swallowed. “Look,” he said. “I got sixty-five acres here. Did you ever hear of the Farmers’ Association?”

“Why, sure.”

“Well, I belong to it. We had a meeting last night. Now, do you know who runs the Farmers’ Association? I’ll tell you. The Bank of the West. That bank owns most of this valley, and it’s got paper on everything it don’t own. So last night the member from the bank told me, he said, ‘You’re paying thirty cents an hour. You’d better cut it down to twenty-five.’ I said, ‘I’ve got good men. They’re worth thirty.’ And he says, ‘It isn’t that,’ he says. ‘The wage is twenty-five now. If you pay thirty, it’ll only cause unrest. And by the way,’ he says, ‘you going to need the usual amount for a crop loan next year?’” Thomas stopped. His breath was panting through his lips. “You see? The rate is twenty-five cents—and like it.”

“We done good work,” Timothy said helplessly.

“Ain’t you got it yet? Mr. Bank hires two thousand men an’ I hire three. I’ve got paper to meet. Now if you can figure some way out, by Christ, I’ll take it! They got me.”

Timothy shook his head. “I don’ know what to say.”

“You wait here.” Thomas walked quickly to the house. The door slammed after him. In a moment he was back, and he carried a newspaper in his hand. “Did you see this? Here, I’ll read it: ‘Citizens, angered at red agitators, burn squatters’ camp. Last night a band of citizens, infuriated at the agitation going on in a local squatters’ camp, burned the tents to the ground and warned agitators to get out of the county.’”

Tom began, “Why, I —” and then he closed his mouth and was silent.

Thomas folded the paper carefully and put it in his pocket. He had himself in control again. He said quietly, “Those men were sent out by the Association. Now I’m giving ’em away. And if they ever find out I told, I won’t have a farm next year.”

“I jus’ don’t know what to say,” Timothy said. “If they was agitators, I can see why they was mad.”

Thomas said, “I watched it a long time. There’s always red agitators just before a pay cut. Always. Goddamn it, they got me trapped. Now, what are you going to do? Twenty-five cents?”

Timothy looked at the ground. “I’ll work,” he said.

“Me too,” said Wilkie.

Tom said, “Seems like I walked into somepin. Sure, I’ll work. I got to work.”

Thomas pulled a bandanna out of his hip pocket and wiped his mouth and chin. “I don’t know how long it can go on. I don’t know how you men can feed a family on what you get now.”

“We can while we work,” Wilkie said. “It’s when we don’t git work.”

Thomas looked at his watch. “Well, let’s go out and dig some ditch. By God,” he said, “I’m a-gonna tell you. You fellas live in that government camp, don’t you?”

Timothy stiffened. “Yes, sir.”

“And you have dances every Saturday night?”

Wilkie smiled. “We sure do.”

“Well, look out next Saturday night.”

Suddenly Timothy straightened. He stepped close. “What you mean? I belong to the Central Committee. I got to know.”

Thomas looked apprehensive. “Don’t you ever tell I told.”

“What is it?” Timothy demanded.

“Well, the Association don’t like the government camps. Can’t get a deputy in there. The people make their own laws, I hear, and you can’t arrest a man without a warrant. Now if there was a big fight and maybe shooting—a bunch of deputies could go in and clean out the camp.”

Timothy had changed. His shoulders were straight and his eyes cold. “What you mean?”

“Don’t you ever tell where you heard,” Thomas said uneasily. “There’s going to be a fight in the camp Saturday night. And there’s going to be deputies ready to go in.”

Tom demanded, “Why, for God’s sake? Those folks ain’t bothering nobody.”

“I’ll tell you why,” Thomas said. “Those folks in the camp are getting used to being treated like humans. When they go back to the squatters’ camps they’ll be hard to handle.” He wiped his face again. “Go on out to work now. Jesus, I hope I haven’t talked myself out of my farm. But I like you people.”

Timothy stepped in front of him and put out a hard lean hand, and Thomas took it. “Nobody won’t know who tol’. We thank you. They won’t be no fight.”

“Go on to work,” Thomas said. “And it’s twenty-five cents an hour.”

“We’ll take it,” Wilkie said, “from you.”

Thomas walked away toward the house. “I’ll be out in a piece,” he said. “You men get to work.” The screen door slammed behind him.

The three men walked out past the little white-washed barn, and along a field edge. They came to a long narrow ditch with sections of concrete pipe lying beside it.

“Here’s where we’re a-workin’,” Wilkie said.

His father opened the barn and passed out two picks and three shovels. And he said to Tom, “Here’s your beauty.”

Tom hefted the pick. “Jumping Jesus! If she don’t feel good!”

“Wait’ll about ’leven o’clock,” Wilkie suggested. “See how good she feels then.”

They walked to the end of the ditch. Tom took off his coat and dropped it on the dirt pile. He pushed up his cap and stepped into the ditch. Then he spat on his hands. The pick arose into the air and flashed down. Tom grunted softly. The pick rose and fell, and the grunt came at the moment it sank into the ground and loosened the soil.

Wilkie said, “Yes, sir, Pa, we got here a first-grade muckstick man. This here boy been married to that there little digger.”

Tom said, “I put in time (*umph*). Yes, sir, I sure did (*umph*). Put in my years (*umph!*). Kinda like the feel (*umph!*).” The soil loosened ahead of him. The sun cleared the fruit trees now and the grape leaves were golden green on the vines. Six feet along and Tom stepped aside and wiped his forehead. Wilkie came behind him. The shovel rose and fell and the dirt flew out to the pile beside the lengthening ditch.

“I heard about this here Central Committee,” said Tom. “So you’re one of ’em.”

“Yes, sir,” Timothy replied. “And it’s a responsibility. All them people. We’re doin’ our best. An’ the people in the camp a-doin’ their best. I wisht them big farmers wouldn’ plague us so. I wisht

they wouldn'."

Tom climbed back into the ditch and Wilkie stood aside. Tom said, "How 'bout this fight (*umph!*) at the dance, he tol' about (*umph*)? What they wanta do that for?"

Timothy followed behind Wilkie, and Timothy's shovel beveled the bottom of the ditch and smoothed it ready for the pipe. "Seems like they got to drive us," Timothy said. "They're scairt we'll organize, I guess. An' maybe they're right. This here camp is a organization. People there look out for theirselves. Got the nicest strang band in these parts. Got a little charge account in the store for folks that's hungry. Fi' dollars—you can git that much food an' the camp'll stan' good. We ain't never had no trouble with the law. I guess the big farmers is scairt of that. Can't throw us in jail—why, it scares 'em. Figger maybe if we can gove'n ourselves, maybe we'll do other things."

Tom stepped clear of the ditch and wiped the sweat out of his eyes. "You hear what that paper said 'bout agitators up north a Bakersfiel'?"

"Sure," said Wilkie. "They do that all a time."

"Well, I was there. They wasn't no agitators. What they call reds. What the hell is these reds anyways?"

Timothy scraped a little hill level in the bottom of the ditch. The sun made his white bristle beard shine. "They's a lot a fellas wanta know what reds is." He laughed. "One of our boys foun' out." He patted the piled earth gently with his shovel. "Fella named Hines—got 'bout thirty thousan' acres, peaches and grapes—got a cannery an' a winery. Well, he's all a time talkin' about 'them goddamn reds.' 'Goddamn reds is drivin' the country to ruin,' he says, an'"We got to drive these here red bastards out.' Well, they were a young fella jus' come out west here, an' he's listenin' one day. He kinda scratched his head an' he says, 'Mr. Hines, I ain't been here long. What is these goddamn reds?' Well, sir, Hines says, 'A red is any son-of-a-bitch that wants thirty cents an hour when we're payin' twenty-five!' Well, this young fella he thinks about her, an' he scratches his head, an' he says, 'Well, Jesus, Mr. Hines. I ain't a son-of-a-bitch, but if that's what a red is—why, I want thirty cents an hour. Ever'body does. Hell, Mr. Hines, we're all reds.'" Timothy drove his shovel along the ditch bottom, and the solid earth shone where the shovel cut it.

Tom laughed. “Me too, I guess.” His pick arced up and drove down, and the earth cracked under it. The sweat rolled down his forehead and down the sides of his nose, and it glistened on his neck. “Damn it,” he said, “a pick is a nice tool (*umph*), if you don’ fight it (*umph*). You an’ the pick (*umph*) workin’ together (*umph*).”

In line, the three men worked, and the ditch inched along, and the sun shone hotly down on them in the growing morning.

When Tom left her, Ruthie gazed in at the door of the sanitary unit for a while. Her courage was not strong without Winfield to boast for. She put a bare foot in on the concrete floor, and then withdrew it. Down the line a woman came out of a tent and started a fire in a tin camp stove. Ruthie took a few steps in that direction, but she could not leave. She crept to the entrance of the Joad tent and looked in. On one side, lying on the ground, lay Uncle John, his mouth open and his snores bubbling spittily in his throat. Ma and Pa were covered with a comfort, their heads in, away from the light. Al was on the far side from Uncle John, and his arm was flung over his eyes. Near the front of the tent Rose of Sharon and Winfield lay, and there was the space where Ruthie had been, beside Winfield. She squatted down and peered in. Her eyes remained on Winfield’s tow head; and as she looked, the little boy opened his eyes and stared out at her, and his eyes were solemn. Ruthie put her finger to her lips and beckoned with her other hand. Winfield rolled his eyes over to Rose of Sharon. Her pink flushed face was near to him, and her mouth was open a little. Winfield carefully loosened the blanket and slipped out. He crept out of the tent cautiously and joined Ruthie. “How long you been up?” he whispered.

She led him away with elaborate caution, and when they were safe, she said, “I never been to bed. I was up all night.”

“You was not,” Winfield said. “You’re a dirty liar.”

“Awright,” she said. “If I’m a liar I ain’t gonna tell you nothin’ that happened. I ain’t gonna tell how the fella got killed with a stab knife an’ how they was a bear come in an’ took off a little chile.”

“They wasn’t no bear,” Winfield said uneasily. He brushed up his hair with his fingers and he pulled down his overalls at the crotch.

“All right—they wasn’t no bear,” she said sarcastically.

“An’ they ain’t no white things made outa dish-stuff, like in the

catalogues."

Winfield regarded her gravely. He pointed to the sanitary unit. "In there?" he asked.

"I'm a dirty liar," Ruthie said. "It ain't gonna do me no good to tell stuff to you."

"Le's go look," Winfield said.

"I already been," Ruthie said. "I already set on 'em. I even pee'd in one."

"You never neither," said Winfield.

They went to the unit building, and that time Ruthie was not afraid. Boldly she led the way into the building. The toilets lined one side of the large room, and each toilet had its compartment with a door in front of it. The porcelain was gleaming white. Hand basins lined another wall, while on the third wall were four shower compartments.

"There," said Ruthie. "Them's the toilets. I seen 'em in the catalogue." The children drew near to one of the toilets. Ruthie, in a burst of bravado, boosted her skirt and sat down. "I tol' you I been here," she said. And to prove it, there was a tinkle of water in the bowl.

Winfield was embarrassed. His hand twisted the flushing lever. There was a roar of water. Ruthie leaped into the air and jumped away. She and Winfield stood in the middle of the room and looked at the toilet. The hiss of water continued in it.

"You done it," Ruthie said. "You went an' broke it. I seen you."

"I never. Honest I never."

"I seen you," Ruthie said. "You jus' ain't to be trusted with no nice stuff."

Winfield sunk his chin. He looked up at Ruthie and his eyes filled with tears. His chin quivered. And Ruthie was instantly contrite.

"Never you mind," she said. "I won't tell on you. We'll pretend like she was already broke. We'll pretend we ain't even been in here." She led him out of the building.

The sun lipped over the mountain by now, shone on the corrugated-iron roofs of the five sanitary units, shone on the gray tents and on the swept ground of the streets between the tents. And the camp was waking up. The fires were burning in camp stoves, in the stoves made of kerosene cans and of sheets of metal. The smell

of smoke was in the air. Tent flaps were thrown back and people moved about in the streets. In front of the Joad tent Ma stood looking up and down the street. She saw the children and came over to them.

"I was worryin'," Ma said. "I didn' know where you was."

"We was jus' lookin'," Ruthie said.

"Well, where's Tom? You seen him?"

Ruthie became important. "Yes, ma'am. Tom, he got me up an' he tol' me what to tell you." She paused to let her importance be apparent.

"Well—what?" Ma demanded.

"He said tell you —" She paused again and looked to see that Winfield appreciated her position.

Ma raised her hand, the back of it toward Ruthie. "What?"

"He got work," said Ruthie quickly. "Went out to work." She looked apprehensively at Ma's raised hand. The hand sank down again, and then it reached out for Ruthie. Ma embraced Ruthie's shoulders in a quick convulsive hug, and then released her.

Ruthie stared at the ground in embarrassment, and changed the subject. "They got toilets over there," she said. "White ones."

"You been in there?" Ma demanded.

"Me an' Winfiel'," she said; and then, treacherously, "Winfiel', he bust a toilet."

Winfield turned red. He glared at Ruthie. "She pee'd in one," he said viciously.

Ma was apprehensive. "Now what did you do? You show me." She forced them to the door and inside. "Now what'd you do?"

Ruthie pointed. "It was a-hissin' and a-swishin'. Stopped now."

"Show me what you done," Ma demanded.

Winfield went reluctantly to the toilet. "I didn' push it hard," he said. "I jus' had aholt of this here, an'—" The swish of water came again. He leaped away.

Ma threw back her head and laughed, while Ruthie and Winfield regarded her resentfully. "Tha's the way she works," Ma said. "I seen them before. When you finish, you push that."

The shame of their ignorance was too great for the children. They went out the door, and they walked down the street to stare at a

large family eating breakfast.

Ma watched them out of the door. And then she looked about the room. She went to the shower closets and looked in. She walked to the wash basins and ran her finger over the white porcelain. She turned the water on a little and held her finger in the stream, and jerked her hand away when the water came hot. For a moment she regarded the basin, and then, setting the plug, she filled the bowl a little from the hot faucet, a little from the cold. And then she washed her hands in the warm water, and she washed her face. She was brushing water through her hair with her fingers when a step sounded on the concrete floor behind her. Ma swung around. An elderly man stood looking at her with an expression of righteous shock.

He said harshly, “How you come in here?”

Ma gulped, and she felt the water dripping from her chin and soaking through her dress. “I didn’ know,” she said apologetically. “I thought this here was for folks to use.”

The elderly man frowned on her. “For men folks,” he said sternly. He walked to the door and pointed to a sign on it: MEN. “There,” he said. “That proves it. Didn’ you see that?”

“No,” Ma said in shame, “I never seen it. Ain’t they a place where I can go?”

The man’s anger departed. “You jus’ come?” he asked more kindly.

“Middle of the night,” said Ma.

“Then you ain’t talked to the Committee?”

“What committee?”

“Why, the Ladies’ Committee.”

“No, I ain’t.”

He said proudly, “The Committee’ll call on you purty soon an’ fix you up. We take care of folks that jus’ come in. Now, if you want a ladies’ toilet, you jus’ go on the other side of the building. That side’s yourn.”

Ma said uneasily, “Ya say a ladies’ committee—comin’ to my tent?”

He nodded his head. “Purty soon, I guess.”

“Thank ya,” said Ma. She hurried out, and half ran to the tent.

“Pa,” she called. “John, git up! You, Al. Git up an’ git washed.” Startled sleepy eyes looked out at her. “All of you,” Ma cried. “You git up an’ git your face washed. An’ comb your hair.”

Uncle John looked pale and sick. There was a red bruised place on his chin.

Pa demanded, “What’s the matter?”

“The Committee,” Ma cried. “They’s a committee—a ladies’ committee a-comin’ to visit. Git up now, an’ git washed. An’ while we was a-sleepin’ an’ a-snorin’, Tom’s went out an’ got work. Git up, now.”

They came sleepily out of the tent. Uncle John staggered a little, and his face was pained.

“Git over to that house and wash up,” Ma ordered. “We got to get breakfus’ an’ be ready for the Committee.” She went to a little pile of split wood in the camp lot. She started a fire and put up her cooking irons. “Pone,” she said to herself. “Pone an’ gravy. That’s quick. Got to be quick.” She talked on to herself, and Ruthie and Winfield stood by, wondering.

The smoke of the morning fires arose all over the camp, and the mutter of talk came from all sides.

Rose of Sharon, unkempt and sleepy-eyed, crawled out of the tent. Ma turned from the cornmeal she was measuring in fistfuls. She looked at the girl’s wrinkled dirty dress, at her frizzled uncombed hair. “You got to clean up,” she said briskly. “Go right over and clean up. You got a clean dress. I washed it. Git your hair combed. Git the seeds out a your eyes.” Ma was excited.

Rose of Sharon said sullenly, “I don’ feel good. I wisht Connie would come. I don’t feel like doin’ nothin’ ’thout Connie.”

Ma turned full around on her. The yellow cornmeal clung to her hands and wrists. “Rosasharn,” she said sternly, “you git upright. You jus’ been mopin’ enough. They’s a ladies’ committee a-comin’, an’ the fambly ain’t gonna be frawny when they get here.”

“But I don’ feel good.”

Ma advanced on her, mealy hands held out. “Git,” Ma said. “They’s times when how you feel got to be kep’ to yourself.”

“I’m a-goin’ to vomit,” Rose of Sharon whined.

“Well, go an’ vomit. ’Course you’re gonna vomit. Ever’body does. Git it over an’ then you clean up, an’ you wash your legs an’ put on

them shoes of yourn." She turned back to her work. "An' braid your hair," she said.

A frying pan of grease sputtered over the fire, and it splashed and hissed when Ma dropped the pone in with a spoon. She mixed flour with grease in a kettle and added water and salt and stirred the gravy. The coffee began to turn over in the gallon can, and the smell of coffee rose from it.

Pa wandered back from the sanitary unit, and Ma looked critically up. Pa said, "Ya say Tom's got work?"

"Yes, sir. Went out 'fore we was awake. Now look in that box an' get you some clean overhalls an' a shirt. An', Pa, I'm awful busy. You git in Ruthie an' Winfiel's ears. They's hot water. Will you do that? Scrounge aroun' in their ears good, an' their necks. Get 'em red an' shinin'."

"Never seen you so bubbly," Pa said.

Ma cried, "This here's the time the fambly got to get decent. Comin' acrost they wasn't no chancet. But now we can. Th'ow your dirty overhalls in the tent an' I'll wash 'em out."

Pa went inside the tent, and in a moment he came out with pale blue, washed overalls and shirt on. And he led the sad and startled children toward the sanitary unit.

Ma called after him, "Scrounge aroun' good in their ears."

Uncle John came to the door of the men's side and looked out, and then he went back and sat on the toilet a long time and held his aching head in his hands.

Ma had taken up a panload of brown pone and was dropping spoons of dough in the grease for a second pan when a shadow fell on the ground beside her. She looked over her shoulder. A little man dressed all in white stood behind her—a man with a thin, brown, lined face and merry eyes. He was lean as a picket. His white clean clothes were frayed at the seams. He smiled at Ma. "Good morning," he said.

Ma looked at his white clothes and her face hardened with suspicion. "Mornin'," she said.

"Are your Mrs. Joad?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm Jim Rawley. I'm camp manager. Just dropped by to see if everything's all right. Got everything you need?"

Ma studied him suspiciously. “Yes,” she said.

Rawley said, “I was asleep when you came last night. Lucky we had a place for you.” His voice was warm.

Ma said simply, “It’s nice. ’Specially them wash tubs.”

“You wait till the women get to washing. Pretty soon now. You never heard such a fuss. Like a meeting. Know what they did yesterday, Mrs. Joad? They had a chorus. Singing a hymn tune and rubbing the clothes all in time. That was something to hear, I tell you.”

The suspicion was going out of Ma’s face. “Must a been nice. You’re the boss?”

“No,” he said. “The people here worked me out of a job. They keep the camp clean, they keep order, they do everything. I never saw such people. They’re making clothes in the meeting hall. And they’re making toys. Never saw such people.”

Ma looked down at her dirty dress. “We ain’t clean yet,” she said. “You jus’ can’t keep clean a-travelin’.”

“Don’t I know it,” he said. He sniffed the air. “Say—is that your coffee smells so good?”

Ma smiled. “Does smell nice, don’t it? Outside it always smells nice.” And she said proudly, “We’d take it in honor ’f you’d have some breakfus’ with us.”

He came to the fire and squatted on his hams, and the last of Ma’s resistance went down. “We’d be proud to have ya,” she said. “We ain’t got much that’s nice, but you’re welcome.”

The little man grinned at her. “I had my breakfast. But I’d sure like a cup of that coffee. Smells so good.”

“Why—why, sure.”

“Don’t hurry yourself.”

Ma poured a tin cup of coffee from the gallon can. She said, “We ain’t got sugar yet. Maybe we’ll get some today. If you need sugar, it won’t taste good.”

“Never use sugar,” he said. “Spoils the taste of good coffee.”

“Well, I like a little sugar,” said Ma. She looked at him suddenly and closely, to see how he had come so close so quickly. She looked for motive on his face, and found nothing but friendliness. Then she looked at the frayed seams on his white coat, and she was

reassured.

He sipped the coffee. “I guess the ladies’ll be here to see you this morning.”

“We ain’t clean,” Ma said. “They shouldn’t be comin’ till we get cleaned up a little.”

“But they know how it is,” the manager said. “They came in the same way. No, sir. The committees are good in this camp because they do know.” He finished his coffee and stood up. “Well, I got to go on. Anything you want, why, come over to the office. I’m there all the time. Grand coffee. Thank you.” He put the cup on the box with the others, waved his hand, and walked down the line of tents. And Ma heard him speaking to the people as he went.

Ma put down her head and she fought with a desire to cry.

Pa came back leading the children, their eyes still wet with pain at the ear-scrounging. They were subdued and shining. The sunburned skin on Winfield’s nose was scrubbed off. “There,” Pa said. “Got dirt an’ two layers a skin. Had to almost lick ’em to make ’em stan’ still.”

Ma appraised them. “They look nice,” she said. “He’p yaself to pone an’ gravy. We got to get stuff outa the way an’ the tent in order.”

Pa served plates for the children and for himself. “Wonder where Tom got work?”

“I dunno.”

“Well, if he can, we can.”

Al came excitedly to the tent. “What a place!” he said. He helped himself and poured coffee. “Know what a fella’s doin’? He’s buildin’ a house trailer. Right over there, back a them tents. Got beds an’ a stove—ever’thing. Jus’ live in her. By God, that’s the way to live! Right where you stop—tha’s where you live.”

Ma said, “I ruther have a little house. Soon’s we can, I want a little house.”

Pa said, “Al—after we’ve et, you an’ me an’ Uncle John’ll take the truck an’ go out lookin’ for work.”

“Sure,” said Al. “I like to get a job in a garage if they’s any jobs. Tha’s what I really like. An’ get me a little ol’ cut-down Ford. Paint her yella an’ go a-kyoodlin’ aroun’. Seen a purty girl down the road. Give her a big wink, too. Purty as hell, too.”

Pa said sternly, “You better get you some work ’fore you go a-tom-cattin’.”

Uncle John came out of the toilet and moved slowly near. Ma frowned at him.

“You ain’t washed—” she began, and then she saw how sick and weak and sad he looked. “You go on in the tent an’ lay down,” she said. “You ain’t well.”

He shook his head. “No,” he said. “I sinned, an’ I got to take my punishment.” He squatted down disconsolately and poured himself a cup of coffee.

Ma took the last pones from the pan. She said casually, “The manager of the camp come an’ set an’ had a cup a coffee.”

Pa looked over slowly. “Yeah? What’s he want awready?”

“Jus’ come to pass the time,” Ma said daintily. “Jus’ set down an’ had coffee. Said he didn’ get good coffee so often, an’ smelt our’n.”

“What’d he want?” Pa demanded again.

“Didn’ want nothin’. Come to see how we was gettin’ on.”

“I don’ believe it,” Pa said. “He’s probably a-snootin’ an’ a-smellin’ aroun’.”

“He was not!” Ma cried angrily. “I can tell a fella that’s snootin’ aroun’ quick as the nex’ person.”

Pa tossed his coffee grounds out of his cup.

“You got to quit that,” Ma said. “This here’s a clean place.”

“You see she don’t get so goddamn clean a fella can’t live in her,” Pa said jealously. “Hurry up, Al. We’re goin’ out lookin’ for a job.”

Al wiped his mouth with his hand. “I’m ready,” he said.

Pa turned to Uncle John. “You a-comin’?”

“Yes, I’m a-comin’.”

“You don’t look so good.”

“I ain’t so good, but I’m comin’.”

Al got in the truck. “Have to get gas,” he said. He started the engine. Pa and Uncle John climbed in beside him and the truck moved away down the street.

Ma watched them go. And then she took a bucket and went to the wash trays under the open part of the sanitary unit. She filled her bucket with hot water and carried it back to her camp. And she was washing the dishes in the bucket when Rose of Sharon came back.

“I put your stuff on a plate,” Ma said. And then she looked closely at the girl. Her hair was dripping and combed, and her skin was bright and pink. She had put on the blue dress printed with little white flowers. On her feet she wore the heeled slippers of her wedding. She blushed under Ma’s gaze. “You had a bath,” Ma said.

Rose of Sharon spoke huskily. “I was in there when a lady come in an’ done it. Know what you do? You get in a little stall-like, an’ you turn handles, an’ water comes a-floodin’ down on you—hot water or col’ water, jus’ like you want it—an’ I done it!”

“I’m a-goin’ to myself,” Ma cried. “Jus’ soon as I get finish’ here. You show me how.”

“I’m a-gonna do it ever’ day,” the girl said. “An’ that lady—she seen me, an’ she seen about the baby, an’—know what she said? Said they’s a nurse comes ever’ week. An’ I’m to go see that nurse an’ she’ll tell me jus’ what to do so’s the baby’ll be strong. Says all the ladies here do that. An’ I’m a-gonna do it.” The words bubbled out. “An’—know what—? Las’ week they was a baby borned an’ the whole camp give a party, an’ they give clothes, an’ they give stuff for the baby—even give a baby buggy—wicker one. Wasn’t new, but they give it a coat a pink paint, an’ it was jus’ like new. An’ they give the baby a name, an’ had a cake. Oh, Lord!” She subsided, breathing heavily.

Ma said, “Praise God, we come home to our own people. I’m a-gonna have a bath.”

“Oh, it’s nice,” the girl said.

Ma wiped the tin dishes and stacked them. She said, “We’re Joads. We don’t look up to nobody. Grampa’s grampa, he fit in the Revolution. We was farm people till the debt. And then—them people. They done somepin to us. Ever’ time they come seemed like they was a-whippin’ me—all of us. An’ in Needles, that police. He done somepin to me, made me feel mean. Made me feel ashamed. An’ now I ain’t ashamed. These folks is our folks—is our folks. An’ that manager, he come an’ set an’ drank coffee, an’ he says, ‘Mrs. Joad’ this, an’‘Mrs. Joad’ that—an’ ‘How you gettin’ on, Mrs. Joad?’” She stopped and sighed. “Why, I feel like people again.” She stacked the last dish. She went into the tent and dug through the clothes box for her shoes and a clean dress. And she found a little paper package with her earrings in it. As she went past Rose of Sharon, she said, “If them ladies comes, you tell ’em I’ll be right

back." She disappeared around the side of the sanitary unit.

Rose of Sharon sat down heavily on a box and regarded her wedding shoes, black patent leather and tailored black bows. She wiped the toes with her finger and wiped her finger on the inside of her skirt. Leaning down put a pressure on her growing abdomen. She sat up straight and touched herself with exploring fingers, and she smiled a little as she did it.

Along the road a stocky woman walked, carrying an apple box of dirty clothes toward the wash tubs. Her face was brown with sun, and her eyes were black and intense. She wore a great apron, made from a cotton bag, over her gingham dress, and men's brown oxfords were on her feet. She saw that Rose of Sharon caressed herself, and she saw the little smile on the girl's face.

"So!" she cried, and she laughed with pleasure. "What you think it's gonna be?"

Rose of Sharon blushed and looked down at the ground, and then peeked up, and the little shiny black eyes of the woman took her in. "I don' know," she mumbled.

The woman plopped the apple box on the ground. "Got a live tumor," she said, and she cackled like a happy hen. "Which'd you ruther?" she demanded.

"I dunno—boy, I guess. Sure—boy."

"You jus' come in, didn' ya?"

"Las' night—late."

"Gonna stay?"

"I don' know. 'F we can get work, guess we will."

A shadow crossed the woman's face, and the little black eyes grew fierce. "'F you can git work. That's what we all say."

"My brother got a job already this mornin'."

"Did, huh? Maybe you're lucky. Look out for luck. You can't trus' luck." She stepped close. "You can only git one kind a luck. Cain't have more. You be a good girl," she said fiercely. "You be good. If you got sin on you—you better watch out for that there baby." She squatted down in front of Rose of Sharon. "They's scandalous things goes on in this here camp," she said darkly. "Ever' Sat'dy night they's dancin', an' not only squar' dancin', neither. They's some does clutch-an'-hug dancin'! I seen 'em."

Rose of Sharon said guardedly, "I like dancin', squar' dancin'."

And she added virtuously, “I never done that other kind.”

The brown woman nodded her head dismally. “Well, some does. An’ the Lord ain’t lettin’ it get by, neither; an’ don’ you think He is.”

“No, ma’am,” the girl said softly.

The woman put one brown wrinkled hand on Rose of Sharon’s knee, and the girl flinched under the touch. “You let me warn you now. They ain’t but a few deep down Jesus-lovers lef’. Ever’ Sat’dy night when that there strang ban’ starts up an’ should be a-playin’ hymnody, they’re a-reelin’—yes, sir, a-reelin’. I seen ’em. Won’ go near, myself, nor I don’ let my kin go near. They’s clutch-an’-hug, I tell ya.” She paused for emphasis and then said, in a hoarse whisper, “They do more. They give a stage play.” She backed away and cocked her head to see how Rose of Sharon would take such a revelation.

“Actors?” the girl said in awe.

“No, sir!” the woman exploded. “Not *actors*, not them already damn’ people. Our own kinda folks. Our own people. An’ they was little children didn’ know no better, in it, an’ they was pertendin’ to be stuff they wasn’t. I didn’ go near. But I hearn ’em talkin’ what they was a-doin’. The devil was jus’ a-struttin’ through this here camp.”

Rose of Sharon listened, her eyes and mouth open. “Oncet in school we give a Chris’ chile play—Christmus.”

“Well—I ain’ sayin’ tha’s bad or good. They’s good folks thinks a Chris’ chile is awright. But—well, I wouldn’ care to come right out flat an’ say so. But this here wasn’ no Chris’ chile. This here was sin an’ delusion an’ devil stuff. Struttin’ an’ paradin’ an’ speakin’ like they’re somebody they ain’t. An’ dancin’ an’ clutchin’ an’ a-huggin’.”

Rose of Sharon sighed.

“An’ not jus’ a few, neither,” the brown woman went on. “Gettin’ so’s you can almos’ count the deep-down lamb-blood folks on your toes. An’ don’ you think them sinners is puttin’ nothin’ over on God, neither. No, sir, He’s a-chalkin’ ’em up sin by sin, an’ He’s drawin’ His line an’ addin’ ’em up sin by sin. God’s a-watchin’, an’ I’m a-watchin’. He’s awready smoked two of ’em out.”

Rose of Sharon panted, “Has?”

The brown woman’s voice was rising in intensity. “I seen it. Girl

a-carryin' a little one, jes' like you. An' she play-acted, an' she hug-danced. And"—the voice grew bleak and ominous—"she thinned out and she skinnied out, an'—she dropped that baby, dead."

"Oh, my!" The girl was pale.

"Dead and bloody. 'Course nobody wouldn' speak to her no more. She had a go away. Can't tech sin 'thout catchin' it. No, sir. An' they was another, done the same thing. An' she skinnied out, an'—know what? One night she was gone. An' two days, she's back. Says she was visitin'. But—she ain't got no baby. Know what I think? I think the manager, he took her away to drop her baby. He don' believe in sin. Tol' me hisself. Says the sin is bein' hungry. Says the sin is bein' cold. Says—I tell ya, he tol' me hisself—can't see God in them things. Says them girls skinnied out 'cause they didn' git 'nough food. Well, I fixed him up." She rose to her feet and stepped back. Her eyes were sharp. She pointed a rigid fore-finger in Rose of Sharon's face. "I says, 'Git back!' I says. I says, 'I knowed the devil was rampagin' in this here camp. Now I know who the devil is. Git back, Satan,' I says. An', by Chris', he got back! Tremblin' he was, an' sneaky. Says, 'Please!' Says, 'Please don' make the folks unhappy.' I says, 'Unhappy? How 'bout their soul? How 'bout them dead babies an' them poor sinners ruint 'count of play-actin'?' He jes' looked, an' he give a sick grin an' went away. He knowed when he met a real testifier to the Lord. I says, 'I'm a-helpin' Jesus watch the goin's-on. An' you an' them other sinners ain't gittin' away with it." She picked up her box of dirty clothes. "You take heed. I warned you. You take heed a that pore chile in your belly an' keep outa sin." And she strode away titanically, and her eyes shone with virtue.

Rose of Sharon watched her go, and then she put her head down on her hands and whimpered into her palms. A soft voice sounded beside her. She looked up, ashamed. It was the little white-clad manager. "Don't worry," he said. "Don't you worry."

Her eyes blinded with tears. "But I done it," she cried. "I hug-danced. I didn' tell her. I done it in Sallisaw. Me an' Connie."

"Don't worry," he said.

"She says I'll drop the baby."

"I know she does. I kind of keep my eye on her. She's a good woman, but she makes people unhappy."

Rose of Sharon sniffled wetly. "She knowed two girls los' their

baby right in this here camp."

The manager squatted down in front of her. "Look!" he said. "Listen to me. I know them too. They were too hungry and too tired. And they worked too hard. And they rode on a truck over bumps. They were sick. It wasn't their fault."

"But she said——"

"Don't worry. That woman likes to make trouble."

"But she says you was the devil."

"I know she does. That's because I won't let her make people miserable." He patted her shoulder. "Don't you worry. She doesn't know." And he walked quickly away.

Rose of Sharon looked after him; his lean shoulders jerked as he walked. She was still watching his slight figure when Ma came back, clean and pink, her hair combed and wet, and gathered in a knot. She wore her figured dress and the old cracked shoes; and the little earrings hung in her ears.

"I done it," she said. "I stood in there an' let warm water come a-floodin' an' a-flowin' down over me. An' they was a lady says you can do it ever' day if you want. An'—them ladies' committee come yet?"

"Uh-uh!" said the girl.

"An' you jus' set there an' didn' redd up the camp none!" Ma gathered up the tin dishes as she spoke. "We got to get in shape," she said. "Come on, stir! Get that sack and kinda sweep along the groun'." She picked up the equipment, put the pans in their box and the box in the tent. "Get them beds neat," she ordered. "I tell ya I ain't never felt nothin' so nice as that water."

Rose of Sharon listlessly followed orders. "Ya think Connie'll be back today?"

"Maybe—maybe not. Can't tell."

"You sure he knows where-at to come?"

"Sure."

"Ma—ya don' think—they could a killed him when they burned—?"

"Not him," Ma said confidently. "He can travel when he wants—jackrabbit-quick an' fox-sneaky."

"I wisht he'd come."

“He’ll come when he comes.”

“Ma——”

“I wisht you’d get to work.”

“Well, do you think dancin’ an’ play-actin’ is sins an’ll make me drop the baby?”

Ma stopped her work and put her hands on her hips. “Now what you talkin’ about? You ain’t done no playactin’.”

“Well, some folks here done it, an’ one girl, she dropped her baby —dead—an’ bloody, like it was a judgment.”

Ma stared at her. “Who tol’ you?”

“Lady that come by. An’ that little fella in white clothes, he come by an’ he says that ain’t what done it.”

Ma frowned. “Rosasharn,” she said, “you stop pickin’ at yourself. You’re jest a-teasin’ yourself up to cry. I don’ know what’s come at you. Our folks ain’t never did that. They took what come to ’em dry-eyed. I bet it’s that Connie give you all them notions. He was jes’ too big for his overhalls.” And she said sternly, “Rosasharn, you’re jest one person, an’ they’s a lot of other folks. You git to your proper place. I knowed people built theirself up with sin till they figgered they was big mean shucks in the sight a the Lord.”

“But, Ma——”

“No. Jes’ shut up an’ git to work. You ain’t big enough or mean enough to worry God much. An’ I’m gonna give you the back a my han’ if you don’ stop this pickin’ at yourself.” She swept the ashes into the fire hole and brushed the stones on its edge. She saw the committee coming along the road. “Git workin’,” she said. “Here’s the ladies comin’. Git a-workin’ now, so’s I can be proud.” She didn’t look again, but she was conscious of the approach of the committee.

There could be no doubt that it was the committee; three ladies, washed, dressed in their best clothes: a lean woman with stringy hair and steel-rimmed glasses, a small stout lady with curly gray hair and a small sweet mouth, and a mammoth lady, big of hock and buttock, big of breast, muscled like a dray-horse, powerful and sure. And the committee walked down the road with dignity.

Ma managed to have her back turned when they arrived. They stopped, wheeled, stood in a line. And the great woman boomed, “Mornin’, Mis’ Joad, ain’t it?”

Ma whirled around as though she had been caught off guard. “Why, yes—yes. How’d you know my name?”

“We’re the committee,” the big woman said. “Ladies’ Committee of Sanitary Unit Number Four. We got your name in the office.”

Ma flustered, “We ain’t in very good shape yet. I’d be proud to have you ladies come an’ set while I make up some coffee.”

The plump committee woman said, “Give our names, Jessie. Mention our names to Mis’ Joad. Jessie’s the Chair,” she explained.

Jessie said formally, “Mis’ Joad, this here’s Annie Littlefield an’ Ella Summers, an’ I’m Jessie Bullitt.”

“I’m proud to make your acquaintance,” Ma said. “Won’t you set down? They ain’t nothin’ to set on yet,” she added. “But I’ll make up some coffee.”

“Oh, no,” said Annie formally. “Don’t put yaself out. We jes’ come to call an’ see how you was, an’ try to make you feel at home.”

Jessie Bullitt said sternly, “Annie, I’ll thank you to remember I’m Chair.”

“Oh! Sure, sure. But next week I am.”

“Well, you wait’ll next week then. We change ever’ week,” she explained to Ma.

“Sure you wouldn’ like a little coffee?” Ma asked helplessly.

“No, thank you.” Jessie took charge. “We gonna show you ’bout the sanitary unit fust, an’ then if you wanta, we’ll sign you up in the Ladies’ Club an’ give you duty. ’Course you don’ have to join.”

“Does—does it cost much?”

“Don’t cost nothing but work. An’ when you’re knowed, maybe you can be ’lected to this committee,” Annie interrupted. “Jessie, here, is on the committee for the whole camp. She’s a big committee lady.”

Jessie smiled with pride. “’Lected unanimous,” she said. “Well, Mis’ Joad, I guess it’s time we tol’ you ’bout how the camp runs.”

Ma said, “This here’s my girl, Rosasharn.”

“How do,” they said.

“Better come ’long too.”

The huge Jessie spoke, and her manner was full of dignity and kindness, and her speech was rehearsed.

“You shouldn’ think we’re a-buttin’ into your business, Mis’ Joad.

This here camp got a lot of stuff ever'body uses. An' we got rules we made ourself. Now we're a-goin' to the unit. That there, ever'body uses, an' ever'body got to take care of it." They strolled to the unroofed section where the wash trays were, twenty of them. Eight were in use, the women bending over, scrubbing the clothes, and the piles of wrung-out clothes were heaped on the clean concrete floor. "Now you can use these here any time you want," Jessie said. "The on'y thing is, you got to leave 'em clean."

The women who were washing looked up with interest. Jessie said loudly, "This here's Mis' Joad an' Rosasharn, come to live." They greeted Ma in a chorus, and Ma made a dumpy little bow at them and said, "Proud to meet ya."

Jessie led the committee into the toilet and shower room.

"I been here awready," Ma said. "I even took a bath."

"That's what they're for," Jessie said. "An' they's the same rule. You got to leave 'em clean. Ever' week they's a new committee to swab out oncet a day. Maybe you'll git on that committee. You got to bring your own soap."

"We got to get some soap," Ma said. "We're all out."

Jessie's voice became almost reverential. "You ever used this here kind?" she asked, and pointed to the toilets.

"Yes, ma'am. Right this mornin'."

Jessie sighed. "Tha's good."

Ella Summers said, "Jes' las' week——"

Jessie interrupted sternly, "Mis' Summers—I'll tell."

Ella gave ground. "Oh, awright."

Jessie said, "Las' week, when you was Chair, you done it all. I'll thank you to keep out this week."

"Well, tell what that lady done," Ella said.

"Well," said Jessie, "it ain't this committee's business to go a-blabbin', but I won't pass no names. Lady come in las' week, an' she got in here 'fore the committee got to her, an' she had her ol' man's pants in the toilet, an' she says, 'It's too low, an' it ain't big enough. Bust your back over her,' she says. 'Why couldn' they stick her higher?"' The committee smiled superior smiles.

Ella broke in, "Says, 'Can't put 'nough in at oncet."' And Ella weathered Jessie's stern glance.

Jessie said, “We got our troubles with toilet paper. Rule says you can’t take none away from here.” She clicked her tongue sharply. “Whole camp chips in for toilet paper.” For a moment she was silent, and then she confessed. “Number Four is usin’ more than any other. Somebody’s a-stealin’ it. Come up in general ladies’ meetin’. ‘Ladies’ side, Unit Number Four is usin’ too much.’ Come right up in meetin’!”

Ma was following the conversation breathlessly. “Stealin’ it—what for?”

“Well,” said Jessie, “we had trouble before. Las’ time they was three little girls cuttin’ paper dolls out of it. Well, we caught them. But this time we don’t know. Hardly put a roll out ’fore it’s gone. Come right up in meetin’. One lady says we oughta have a little bell that rings ever’ time the roll turns oncet. Then we could count how many ever’body takes.” She shook her head. “I jes’ don’ know,” she said. “I been worried all week. Somebody’s a-stealin’ toilet paper from Unit Four.”

From the doorway came a whining voice, “Mis’ Bullitt.” The committee turned. “Mis’ Bullitt, I hearn what you says.” A flushed, perspiring woman stood in the doorway. “I couldn’ git up in meetin’. Mis’ Bullitt. I jes’ couldn’. They’d a-laughed or somepin.”

“What you talkin’ about?” Jessie advanced.

“Well, we-all—maybe—it’s us. But we ain’t a-stealin’, Mis’ Bullitt.”

Jessie advanced on her, and the perspiration beaded out on the flustery confessor. “We can’t he’p it. Mis’ Bullitt.”

“Now you tell what you’re tellin’,” Jessie said. “This here unit’s suffered a shame ’bout that toilet paper.”

“All week, Mis’ Bullitt. We couldn’ he’p it. You know I got five girls.”

“What they been a-doin’ with it?” Jessie demanded ominously.

“Jes’ usin’ it. Hones’, jes’ usin’ it.”

“They ain’t got the right! Four-five sheets is enough. What’s the matter’th ’em?”

The confessor bleated, “Skitters. All five of ’em. We been low on money. They et green grapes. They all five got the howlin’ skitters. Run out ever’ ten minutes.” She defended them, “But they ain’t stealin’ it.”

Jessie sighed. “You should a tol’,” she said. “You got to tell. Here’s Unit Four sufferin’ shame ’cause you never tol’. Anybody can git the skitters.”

The meek voice whined, “I jes’ can’t keep ’em from eatin’ them green grapes. An’ they’re a-gettin’ worse all a time.”

Ella Summers burst out, “The Aid. She oughta git the Aid.”

“Ella Summers,” Jessie said, “I’m a-tellin’ you for the las’ time, you ain’t the Chair.” She turned back to the raddled little woman. “Ain’t you got no money, Mis’ Joyce?”

She looked ashamedly down. “No, but we might git work any time.”

“Now you hol’ up your head,” Jessie said. “That ain’t no crime. You jes’ waltz right over t’ the Weedpatch store an’ git you some grocteries. The camp got twenty dollars’ credit there. You git yourself fi’ dollars’ worth. An’ you kin pay it back to the Central Committee when you git work. Mis’ Joyce, you knowed that,” she said sternly. “How come you let your girls git hungry?”

“We ain’t never took no charity,” Mrs. Joyce said.

“This ain’t charity, an’ you know it,” Jessie raged. “We had all that out. They ain’t no charity in this here camp. We won’t have no charity. Now you waltz right over an’ git you some grocteries, an’ you bring the slip to me.”

Mrs. Joyce said timidly, “S’pose we can’t never pay? We ain’t had work for a long time.”

“You’ll pay if you can. If you can’t, that ain’t none of our business, an’ it ain’t your business. One fella went away, an’ two months later he sent back the money. You ain’t got the right to let your girls git hungry in this here camp.”

Mrs. Joyce was cowed. “Yes, ma’am,” she said.

“Git you some cheese for them girls,” Jessie ordered. “That’ll take care a them skitters.”

“Yes, ma’am.” And Mrs. Joyce scuttled out of the door.

Jessie turned in anger on the committee. “She got no right to be stiff-necked. She got no right, not with our own people.”

Annie Littlefield said, “She ain’t been here long. Maybe she don’t know. Maybe she’s took charity one time-another. Nor,” Annie said, “don’t you try to shut me up, Jessie. I got a right to pass speech.” She turned half to Ma. “If a body’s ever took charity, it makes a

burn that don't come out. This ain't charity, but if you ever took it, you don't forget it. I bet Jessie ain't ever done it."

"No, I ain't," said Jessie.

"Well, I did," Annie said. "Las' winter; an' we was a-starvin'—me an' Pa an' the little fellas. An' it was a-rainin'. Fella tol' us to go to the Salvation Army." Her eyes grew fierce. "We was hungry—they made us crawl for our dinner. They took our dignity. They—I hate 'em! An'—maybe Mis' Joyce took charity. Maybe she didn' know this ain't charity. Mis' Joad, we don't allow nobody in this camp to build their-self up that-a-way. We don't allow nobody to give nothing to another person. They can give it to the camp, an' the camp can pass it out. We won't have no charity!" Her voice was fierce and hoarse. "I hate 'em," she said. "I ain't never seen my man beat before, but them—them Salvation Army done it to 'im."

Jessie nodded. "I heard," she said softly, "I heard. We got to take Mis' Joad aroun'."

Ma said, "It sure is nice."

"Le's go to the sewin' room," Annie suggested. "Got two machines. They's a-quiltin', an' they're makin' dresses. You might like ta work over there."

When the committee called on Ma, Ruthie and Winfield faded imperceptibly back out of reach.

"Whyn't we go along an' listen?" Winfield asked.

Ruthie gripped his arm. "No," she said. "We got washed for them sons-a-bitches. I ain't goin' with 'em."

Winfield said, "You tol' on me 'bout the toilet. I'm a-gonna tell what you called them ladies."

A shadow of fear crossed Ruthie's face. "Don' do it. I tol' 'cause I knowed you didn' really break it."

"You did not," said Winfield.

Ruthie said, "Le's look aroun'." They strolled down the line of tents, peering into each one, gawking self-consciously. At the end of the unit there was a level place on which a croquet court had been set up. Half a dozen children played seriously. In front of a tent an elderly lady sat on a bench and watched. Ruthie and Winfield broke into a trot. "Leave us play," Ruthie cried. "Leave us get in."

The children looked up. A pig-tailed little girl said, "Nex' game

you kin."

"I wanta play now," Ruthie cried.

"Well, you can't. Not till nex' game."

Ruthie moved menacingly out on the court. "I'm a-gonna play." The pig-tails gripped her mallet tightly. Ruthie sprang at her, slapped her, pushed her, and wrested the mallet from her hands. "I says I was gonna play," she said triumphantly.

The elderly lady stood up and walked onto the court. Ruthie scowled fiercely and her hands tightened on the mallet. The lady said, "Let her play—like you done with Ralph las' week."

The children laid their mallets on the ground and trooped silently off the court. They stood at a distance and looked on with expressionless eyes. Ruthie watched them go. Then she hit a ball and ran after it. "Come on, Winfiel'. Get a stick," she called. And then she looked in amazement. Winfield had joined the watching children, and he too looked at her with expressionless eyes. Defiantly she hit the ball again. She kicked up a great dust. She pretended to have a good time. And the children stood and watched. Ruthie lined up two balls and hit both of them, and she turned her back on the watching eyes, and then turned back. Suddenly she advanced on them, mallet in hand. "You come an' play," she demanded. They moved silently back at her approach. For a moment she stared at them, and then she flung down the mallet and ran crying for home. The children walked back on the court.

Pigtails said to Winfield, "You can git in the nex' game."

The watching lady warned them, "When she comes back an' wants to be decent, you let her. You was mean yourself, Amy." The game went on, while in the Joad tent Ruthie wept miserably.

The truck moved along the beautiful roads, past orchards where the peaches were beginning to color, past vineyards with the clusters pale and green, under lines of walnut trees whose branches spread half across the road. At each entrance-gate Al slowed; and at each gate there was a sign: "No help wanted. No trespassing."

Al said, "Pa, they's boun' to be work when them fruits gets ready. Funny place—they tell ya they ain't no work 'fore you ask 'em." He drove slowly on.

Pa said, “Maybe we could go in anyways an’ ask if they know where they’s any work. Might do that.”

A man in blue overalls and a blue shirt walked along the edge of the road. Al pulled up beside him. “Hey, mister,” Al said. “Know where they’s any work?”

The man stopped and grinned, and his mouth was vacant of front teeth. “No,” he said. “Do you? I been walkin’ all week, an’ I can’t tree none.”

“Live in that gov’ment camp?” Al asked.

“Yeah!”

“Come on, then. Git up back, an’ we’ll all look.” The man climbed over the side-boards and dropped in the bed.

Pa said, “I ain’t got no hunch we’ll find work. Guess we got to look, though. We don’t even know where-at to look.”

“Shoulda talked to the fellas in the camp,” Al said. “How you feelin’, Uncle John?”

“I ache,” said Uncle John. “I ache all over, an’ I got it comin’. I oughta go away where I won’t bring down punishment on my own folks.”

Pa put his hand on John’s knee. “Look here,” he said, “don’ you go away. We’re droppin’ folks all the time—Grampa an’ Granma dead, Noah an’ Connie—run out, an’ the preacher—in jail.”

“I got a hunch we’ll see that preacher agin,” John said.

Al fingered the ball on the gear-shift lever. “You don’ feel good enough to have no hunches,” he said. “The hell with it. Le’s go back an’ talk, an’find out where they’s some work. We’re jus’ huntin’ skunks under water.” He stopped the truck and leaned out the window and called back, “Hey! Lookie! We’re a-goin’ back to the camp an’ try an’ see where they’s work. They ain’t no use burnin’ gas like this.”

The man leaned over the truck side. “Suits me,” he said. “My dogs is wore clean up to the ankle. An’ I ain’t even got a nibble.”

Al turned around in the middle of the road and headed back.

Pa said, “Ma’s gonna be purty hurt, ’specially when Tom got work so easy.”

“Maybe he never got none,” Al said. “Maybe he jus’ went lookin’, too. I wisht I could get work in a garage. I’d learn that stuff quick,

an' I'd like it."

Pa grunted, and they drove back toward the camp in silence.

When the committee left, Ma sat down on a box in front of the Joad tent, and she looked helplessly at Rose of Sharon. "Well—" she said, "well—I ain't been so perked up in years. *Wasn't* them ladies nice?"

"I get to work in the nursery," Rose of Sharon said. "They tol' me. I can find out all how to do for babies, an' them I'll know."

Ma nodded in wonder. "Wouldn't it be nice if the menfolks all got work?" she asked. "Them a-workin', an' a little money comin' in?" Her eyes wandered into space. "Them a-workin', an' us a-workin' here, an' all them nice people. Fust thing we get a little ahead I'd get me a little stove—nice one. They don' cost much. An' then we'd get a tent, big enough, an' maybe secon'-han' springs for the beds. An' we'd use this here tent jus' to eat under. An' Sat'dy night we'll go to the dancin'. They says you can invite folks if you want. I wisht we had some frien's to invite. Maybe the men'll know somebody to invite."

Rose of Sharon peered down the road. "That lady that says I'll lose the baby—" she began.

"Now you stop that," Ma warned her.

Rose of Sharon said softly, "I seen her. She's a-comin' here, I think. Yeah! Here she comes. Ma, don't let her——"

Ma turned and looked at the approaching figure.

"Howdy," the woman said. "I'm Mis' Sandry—Lisbeth Sandry. I seen your girl this mornin'."

"Howdy do," said Ma.

"Are you happy in the Lord?"

"Pretty happy," said Ma.

"Are you saved?"

"I been saved." Ma's face was closed and waiting.

"Well, I'm glad," Lisbeth said. "The sinners is awful strong aroun' here. You come to a awful place. They's wicketness all around about. Wicket people, wicket goin's-on that a lamb'-blood Christian jes' can't hardly stan'. They's sinners all around us."

Ma colored a little, and shut her mouth tightly. "Seems to me they's nice people here," she said shortly.

Mrs. Sandry's eyes stared. "Nice!" she cried. "You think they're nice when they's dancin' an' huggin'? I tell ya, ya eternal soul ain't got a chancet in this here camp. Went out to a meetin' in Weedpatch las' night. Know what the preacher says? He says, 'They's wicketness in that camp.' He says, 'The poor is tryin' to be rich.' He says, 'They's dancin' an' huggin' when they should be wailin' an' moanin' in sin.' That's what he says. 'Ever'body that ain't here is a black sinner,' he says. I tell you it made a person feel purty good to hear 'im. An' we knowed we was safe. We ain't danced."

Ma's face was red. She stood up slowly and faced Mrs. Sandry. "Git!" she said. "Git out now, 'fore I git to be a sinner a-tellin' you where to go. Git to your wailin' an' moanin'."

Mrs. Sandry's mouth dropped open. She stepped back. And then she became fierce. "I thought you was Christians."

"So we are," Ma said.

"No, you ain't. You're hell-burnin' sinners, all of you! An' I'll mention it in meetin', too. I can see your black soul a-burnin'. I can see that innocent child in that there girl's belly a-burnin'."

A low wailing cry escaped from Rose of Sharon's lips. Ma stooped down and picked up a stick of wood.

"Git!" she said coldly. "Don' you never come back. I seen your kind before. You'd take the little pleasure, wouldn' you?" Ma advanced on Mrs. Sandry.

For a moment the woman backed away and then suddenly she threw back her head and howled. Her eyes rolled up, her shoulders and arms flopped loosely at her side, and a string of thick ropy saliva ran from the corner of her mouth. She howled again and again, long deep animal howls. Men and women ran up from the other tents, and they stood near—frightened and quiet. Slowly the woman sank to her knees and the howls sank to a shuddering, bubbling moan. She fell sideways and her arms and legs twitched. The white eye-balls showed under the open eyelids.

A man said softly, "The sperit. She got the sperit." Ma stood looking down at the twitching form.

The little manager strolled up casually. "Trouble?" he asked. The crowd parted to let him through. He looked down at the woman. "Too bad," he said. "Will some of you help get her back to her tent?" The silent people shuffled their feet. Two men bent over and

lifted the woman, one held her under the arms and the other took her feet. They carried her away, and the people moved slowly after them. Rose of Sharon went under the tarpaulin and lay down and covered her face with a blanket.

The manager looked at Ma, looked down at the stick in her hand. He smiled tiredly. “Did you clout her?” he asked.

Ma continued to stare after the retreating people. She shook her head slowly. “No—but I would a. Twicet today she worked my girl up.”

The manager said, “Try not to hit her. She isn’t well. She just isn’t well.” And he added softly, “I wish she’d go away, and all her family. She brings more trouble on the camp than all the rest together.”

Ma got herself in hand again. “If she comes back, I might hit her. I ain’t sure. I won’t let her worry my girl no more.”

“Don’t worry about it, Mrs. Joad,” he said. “You won’t ever see her again. She works over the newcomers. She won’t ever come back. She thinks you’re a sinner.”

“Well, I am,” said Ma.

“Sure. Everybody is, but not the way she means. She isn’t well, Mrs. Joad.”

Ma looked at him gratefully, and she called, “You hear that, Rosasharn? She ain’t well. She’s crazy.” But the girl did not raise her head. Ma said, “I’m warnin’ you, mister. If she comes back, I ain’t to be trusted. I’ll hit her.”

He smiled wryly. “I know how you feel,” he said. “But just try not to. That’s all I ask—just try not to.” He walked slowly away toward the tent where Mrs. Sandry had been carried.

Ma went into the tent and sat down beside Rose of Sharon. “Look up,” she said. The girl lay still. Ma gently lifted the blanket from her daughter’s face. “That woman’s kinda crazy,” she said. “Don’t you believe none of them things.”

Rose of Sharon whispered in terror, “When she said about burnin’, I—felt burnin’.”

“That ain’t true,” said Ma.

“I’m tar’d out,” the girl whispered. “I’m tar’d a things happenin’. I wanta sleep. I wanta sleep.”

“Well, you sleep, then. This here’s a nice place. You can sleep.”

“But she might come back.”

“She won’t,” said Ma. “I’m a-gonna set right outside, an’ I won’t let her come back. Res’ up now, ’cause you got to get to work in the nu’sery purty soon.”

Ma struggled to her feet and went to sit in the entrance to the tent. She sat on a box and put her elbows on her knees and her chin in her cupped hands. She saw the movement in the camp, heard the voices of the children, the hammering of an iron rim; but her eyes were staring ahead of her.

Pa, coming back along the road, found her there, and he squatted near her. She looked slowly over at him. “Git work?” she asked.

“No,” he said, ashamed. “We looked.”

“Where’s Al and John and the truck?”

“Al’s fixin’ somepin. Had ta borry some tools. Fella says Al got to fix her there.”

Ma said sadly, “This here’s a nice place. We could be happy here awhile.”

“If we could get work.”

“Yeah! If you could get work.”

He felt her sadness, and studied her face. “What you a-mopin’ about? If it’s sech a nice place why have you got to mope?”

She gazed at him, and she closed her eyes slowly. “Funny, ain’t it. All the time we was a-movin’ an’ shovin’, I never thought none. An’ now these here folks been nice to me, been awful nice; an’ what’s the first thing I do? I go right back over the sad things—that night Grampa died an’ we buried him. I was all full up of the road, and bumpin’ and movin’, an’ it wasn’t so bad. But now I come out here, an’ it’s worse now. An’ Granma—an’ Noah walkin’ away like that! Walkin’ away jus’ down the river. Them things was part of all, an’ now they come a-flockin’ back. Granma a pauper, an’ buried a pauper. That’s sharp now. That’s awful sharp. An’ Noah walkin’ away down the river. He don’ know what’s there. He jus’ don’ know. An’ we don’ know. We ain’t never gonna know if he’s alive or dead. Never gonna know. An’ Connie sneakin’ away. I didn’ give ’em brain room before, but now they’re a-flockin’ back. An’ I oughta be glad ’cause we’re in a nice place.” Pa watched her mouth while she talked. Her eyes were closed. “I can remember how them mountains was, sharp as ol’ teeth beside the river where Noah

walked. I can remember how the stubble was on the groun' where Grampa lies. I can remember the choppin' block back home with a feather caught on it, all criss-crossed with cuts, an' black with chicken blood."

Pa's voice took on her tone. "I seen the ducks today," he said. "Wedgin' south—high up. Seems like they're awful dinky. An' I seen the blackbirds a-settin' on the wires, an' the doves was on the fences." Ma opened her eyes and looked at him. He went on, "I seen a little whirlwin', like a man a-spinnin' acrost a fiel'. An' the ducks drivin' on down, wedgin' on down to the southward."

Ma smiled. "Remember?" she said. "Remember what we'd always say at home? 'Winter's a-comin' early,' we said, when the ducks flew. Always said that, an' winter come when it was ready to come. But we always said, 'She's a-comin' early.' I wonder what we meant."

"I seen the blackbirds on the wires," said Pa. "Settin' so close together. An' the doves. Nothin' sets so still as a dove—on the fence wires—maybe two, side by side. An' this little whirlwin'—big as a man, an' dancin' off acrost a fiel'. Always did like the little fellas, big as a man."

"Wisht I wouldn't think how it is home," said Ma. "It ain't our home no more. Wisht I'd forget it. An' Noah."

"He wasn't ever right—I mean—well, it was my fault."

"I tol' you never to say that. Woudn' a lived at all, maybe."

"But I should a knowed more."

"Now stop," said Ma. "Noah was strange. Maybe he'll have a nice time by the river. Maybe it's better so. We can't do no worryin'. This here is a nice place, an' maybe you'll get work right off."

Pa pointed at the sky. "Look—more ducks. Big bunch. An' Ma, 'Winter's a-comin' early.'"

She chuckled. "They's things you do, an' you don' know why."

"Here's John," said Pa. "Come on an' set, John."

Uncle John joined them. He squatted down in front of Ma. "We didn' get nowheres," he said. "Jus' run aroun'. Say, Al wants to see ya. Says he got to git a tire. Only one layer a cloth lef', he says."

Pa stood up. "I hope he can git her cheap. We ain't got much lef'. Where is Al?"

"Down there, to the nex' cross-street an' turn right. Says gonna

blow out an' spoil a tube if we don' get a new one." Pa strolled away, and his eyes followed the giant V of ducks down the sky.

Uncle John picked a stone from the ground and dropped it from his palm and picked it up again. He did not look at Ma. "They ain't no work," he said.

"You didn' look all over," Ma said.

"No, but they's signs out."

"Well, Tom musta got work. He ain't been back."

Uncle John suggested, "Maybe he went away—like Connie, or like Noah."

Ma glanced sharply at him, and then her eyes softened. "They's things you know," she said. "They's stuff you're sure of. Tom's got work, an' he'll come in this evenin'. That's true," She smiled in satisfaction. "Ain't he a fine boy!" she said. "Ain't he a good boy!"

The cars and trucks began to come into the camp, and the men trooped by toward the sanitary unit. And each man carried clean overalls and shirt in his hand.

Ma pulled herself together. "John, you go find Pa. Get to the store. I want beans an' sugar an'—a piece of fryin' meat an' carrots an'—tell Pa to get somepin nice—anything—but nice—for tonight. Tonight—we'll have—somepin nice."

Chapter 23

The migrant people, scuttling for work, scrabbling to live, looked always for pleasure, dug for pleasure, manufactured pleasure, and they were hungry for amusement. Sometimes amusement lay in speech, and they climbed up their lives with jokes. And it came about in the camps along the roads, on the ditch banks beside the streams, under the sycamores, that the story teller grew into being, so that the people gathered in the low firelight to hear the gifted ones. And they listened while the tales were told, and their participation made the stories great.

I was a recruit against Geronimo——

And the people listened, and their quiet eyes reflected the dying fire.

Them Injuns was cute—slick as snakes, an' quiet when they wanted. Could go through dry leaves, an' make no rustle. Try to do that sometime.

And the people listened and remembered the crash of dry leaves under their feet.

Come the change of season an' the clouds up. Wrong time. Ever hear of the army doing anything right? Give the army ten chances, an' they'll stumble along. Took three regiments to kill a hundred braves—always.

And the people listened, and their faces were quiet with listening. The story tellers, gathering attention into their tales, spoke in great rhythms, spoke in great words because the tales were great, and the listeners became great through them.

They was a brave on a ridge, against the sun. Knowed he stood out. Spread his arms an' stood. Naked as morning, an' against the sun. Maybe he was crazy. I don' know. Stood there, arms spread out; like a cross he looked. Four hunderd yards. An' the men—well, they raised their sights an' they felt the wind with their fingers; an' then they jus' lay there an' couldn' shoot. Maybe that Injun knowed somepin. Knowed we couldn' shoot. Jes' laid there with the rifles cocked, an' didn' even put 'em to our shoulders. Lookin' at him. Head-band, one feather. Could see it, an' naked as the sun. Long time we laid there an' looked, an' he never moved. An' then the captain got mad. "Shoot, you crazy bastards, shoot!" he yells. An'

we jus' laid there. "I'll give you to a five-count, an' then mark you down," the captain says. Well, sir—we put up our rifles slow, an' ever' man hoped somebody'd shoot first. I ain't never been so sad in my life. An' I laid my sights on his belly, 'cause you can't stop a Injun no other place—an'—then. Well, he jest plunked down an' rolled. An' we went up. An' he wasn' big—he'd looked so grand—up there. All tore to pieces an' little. Ever see a cock pheasant, stiff and beautiful, ever' feather drawed an' painted, an' even his eyes drawed in pretty? An' bang! You pick him up—bloody an' twisted, an' you spoiled somepin better'n you; an' eatin' him don't never make it up to you, 'cause you spoiled somepin in yaself, an' you can't never fix it up.

And the people nodded, and perhaps the fire spurted a little light and showed their eyes looking in on themselves.

Against the sun, with his arms out. An' he looked big—as God.

And perhaps a man balanced twenty cents between food and pleasure, and he went to a movie in Marysville or Tulare, in Ceres or Mountain View. And he came back to the ditch camp with his memory crowded. And he told how it was:

They was this rich fella, an' he makes like he's poor, an' they's this rich girl, an' she purtends like she's poor too, an' they meet in a hamburg' stan'.

Why?

I don't know why—that's how it was.

Why'd they purtend like they's poor?

Well, they're tired of bein' rich.

Horseshit!

You want to hear this, or not?

Well, go on then. Sure, I wanta hear it, but if I was rich, if I was rich I'd git so many pork chops—I'd cord 'em up aroun' me like wood, an' I'd eat my way out. Go on.

Well, they each think the other one's poor. An' they git arrested an' they git in jail, an' they don' git out 'cause the other one'd find out the first one is rich. An' the jail keeper, he's mean to 'em 'cause he thinks they're poor. Oughta see how he looks when he finds out. Jes' nearly faints, that's all.

What they git in jail for?

Well, they git caught at some kind a radical meetin' but they ain't

radicals. They jes' happen to be there. An' they don't each one wanta marry fur money, ya see.

So the sons-of-bitches start lyin' to each other right off.

Well, in the pitcher it was like they was doin' good. They're nice to people, you see.

I was to a show oncet that was me, an' more'n me; an' my life, an' more'n my life, so ever'thing was bigger.

Well, I git enough sorrow. I like to git away from it.

Sure—if you can believe it.

So they got married, an' then they foun' out, an' all them people that's treated 'em mean. They was a fella had been uppity, an' he nearly fainted when this fella come in with a plug hat on. Jes' nearly fainted. An' they was a newsreel with them German soldiers kickin' up their feet—funny as hell.

And always, if he had a little money, a man could get drunk. The hard edges gone, and the warmth. Then there was no loneliness, for a man could people his brain with friends, and he could find his enemies and destroy them. Sitting in a ditch, the earth grew soft under him. Failures dulled and the future was no threat. And hunger did not skulk about, but the world was soft and easy, and a man could reach the place he started for. The stars came down wonderfully close and the sky was soft. Death was a friend, and sleep was death's brother. The old times came back—a girl with pretty feet, who danced one time at home—a horse—a long time ago. A horse and a saddle. And the leather was carved. When was that? Ought to find a girl to talk to. That's nice. Might lay with her, too. But warm here. And the stars down so close, and sadness and pleasure so close together, really the same thing. Like to stay drunk all the time. Who says it's bad? Who dares to say it's bad? Preachers—but they got their own kinda drunkenness. Thin, barren women, but they're too miserable to know. Reformers—but they don't bite deep enough into living to know. No—the stars are close and dear and I have joined the brotherhood of the worlds. And everything's holy—everything, even me.

A harmonica is easy to carry. Take it out of your hip pocket, knock it against your palm to shake out the dirt and pocket fuzz and bits

of tobacco. Now it's ready. You can do anything with a harmonica: thin reedy single tone, or chords, or melody with rhythm chords. You can mold the music with curved hands, making it wail and cry like bagpipes, making it full and round like an organ, making it as sharp and bitter as the reed pipes of the hills. And you can play and put it back in your pocket. It is always with you, always in your pocket. And as you play, you learn new tricks, new ways to mold the tone with your hands, to pinch the tone with your lips, and no one teaches you. You feel around—sometimes alone in the shade at noon, sometimes in the tent door after supper when the women are washing up. Your foot taps gently on the ground. Your eyebrows rise and fall in rhythm. And if you lose it or break it, why, it's no great loss. You can buy another for a quarter.

A guitar is more precious. Must learn this thing. Fingers of the left hand must have callus caps. Thumb of the right hand a horn of callus. Stretch the left-hand fingers, stretch them like a spider's legs to get the hard pads on the frets.

This was my father's box. Wasn't no bigger'n a bug first time he give me C chord. An' when I learned as good as him, he hardly never played no more. Used to set in the door, an' listen an' tap his foot. I'm tryin' for a break, an' he'd scowl mean till I get her, an' then he'd settle back easy, an' he'd nod. "Play," he'd say. "Play nice." It's a good box. See how the head is wore. They's many a million songs wore down that wood an' scooped her out. Some day she'll cave in like a egg. But you can't patch her nor worry her no way or she'll lose tone. Play her in the evening, an' they's a harmonica player in the nex' tent. Makes it pretty nice together.

The fiddle is rare, hard to learn. No frets, no teacher.

Jes' listen to a ol' man an' try to pick it up. Won't tell how to double. Says it's a secret. But I watched. Here's how he done it.

Shrill as a wind, the fiddle, quick and nervous and shrill.

She ain't much of a fiddle. Give two dollars for her. Fella says they's fiddles four hundred years old, and they git mellow like whisky. Says they'll cost fifty-sixty thousan' dollars. I don't know. Soun's like a lie. Harsh ol' bastard, ain't she? Wanta dance? I'll rub up the bow with plenty rosin. Man! Then she'll squawk. Hear her a mile.

These three in the evening, harmonica and fiddle and guitar. Playing a reel and tapping out the tune, and the big deep strings of

the guitar beating like a heart, and the harmonica's sharp chords and the skirl and squeal of the fiddle. People have to move close. They can't help it. "Chicken Reel" now, and the feet tap and a young lean buck takes three quick steps, and his arms hang limp. The square closes up and the dancing starts, feet on the bare ground, beating dull, strike with your heels. Hands 'round and swing. Hair falls down, and panting breaths. Lean to the side now.

Look at that Texas boy, long legs loose, taps four times for ever' damn step. Never seen a boy swing aroun' like that. Look at him swing that Cherokee girl, red in her cheeks an' her toe points out. Look at her pant, look at her heave. Think she's tired? Think she's winded? Well, she ain't. Texas boy got his hair in his eyes, mouth's wide open, can't get air, but he pats four times for ever' darn step, an' he'll keep a-going' with the Cherokee girl.

The fiddle squeaks and the guitar bongs. Mouth-organ man is red in the face. Texas boy and the Cherokee girl, pantin' like dogs an' a-beatin' the groun'. Ol' folks stan' a-pattin' their han's. Smilin' a little, tappin' their feet.

Back home—in the schoolhouse, it was. The big moon sailed off to the westward. An' we walked, him an' me—a little ways. Didn' talk 'cause our throats was choked up. Didn' talk none at all. An' purty soon they was a haycock. Went right to it and laid down there. Seein' the Texas boy an' that girl a-steppin' away into the dark—think nobody seen 'em go. Oh, God! I wisht I was a-goin' with that Texas boy. Moon'll be up 'fore long. I seen that girl's ol' man move out to stop 'em, an' then he didn'. He knowed. Might as well stop the fall from comin', and might as well stop the sap from movin' in the trees. An' the moon'll be up 'fore long.

Play more—play the story songs—"As I Walked through the Streets of Laredo."

The fire's gone down. Be a shame to build her up. Little ol' moon'll be up 'fore long.

Beside an irrigation ditch a preacher labored and the people cried. And the preacher paced like a tiger, whipping the people with his voice, and they groveled and whined on the ground. He calculated them, gauged them, played on them, and when they were all squirming on the ground he stooped down and of his great strength he picked each one up in his arms and shouted, Take 'em, Christ!

and threw each one in the water. And when they were all in, waist deep in the water, and looking with frightened eyes at the master, he knelt down on the bank and he prayed for them; and he prayed that all men and women might grovel and whine on the ground. Men and women, dripping, clothes sticking tight, watched; then gurgling and sloshing in their shoes they walked back to the camp, to the tents, and they talked softly in wonder:

We been saved, they said. We're washed white as snow. We won't never sin again.

And the children, frightened and wet, whispered together:

We been saved. We won't sin no more.

Wisht I knowed what all the sins was, so I could do 'em.

The migrant people looked humbly for pleasure on the roads.

Chapter 24

On Saturday morning the wash tubs were crowded. The women washed dresses, pink ginghams and flowered cottons, and they hung them in the sun and stretched the cloth to smooth it. When afternoon came the whole camp quickened and the people grew excited. The children caught the fever and were more noisy than usual. About mid-afternoon child bathing began, and as each child was caught, subdued, and washed, the noise on the playground gradually subsided. Before five, the children were scrubbed and warned about getting dirty again; and they walked about, stiff in clean clothes, miserable with carefulness.

At the big open-air dance platform a committee was busy. Every bit of electric wire had been requisitioned. The city dump had been visited for wire, every tool box had contributed friction tape. And now the patched, spliced wire was strung out to the dance floor, with bottle necks as insulators. This night the floor would be lighted for the first time. By six o'clock the men were back from work or from looking for work, and a new wave of bathing started. By seven, dinners were over, men had on their best clothes: freshly washed overalls, clean blue shirts, sometimes the decent blacks. The girls were ready in their print dresses, stretched and clean, their hair braided and ribboned. The worried women watched the families and cleaned up the evening dishes. On the platform the string band practiced, surrounded by a double wall of children. The people were intent and excited.

In the tent of Ezra Huston, chairman, the Central Committee of five men went into meeting. Huston, a tall spare man, wind-blackened, with eyes like little blades, spoke to his committee, one man from each sanitary unit.

"It's goddamn lucky we got the word they was gonna try to bust up the dance!" he said.

The tubby little representative from Unit Three spoke up. "I think we oughta squash the hell out of 'em, an' show 'em."

"No," said Huston. "That's what they want. No, sir. If they can git a fight goin', then they can run in the cops an' say we ain't orderly. They tried it before—other places." He turned to the sad dark boy from Unit Two. "Got the fellas together to go roun' the fences an'

see nobody sneaks in?"

The sad boy nodded. "Yeah! Twelve. Tol' 'em not to hit nobody. Jes' push 'em out ag'in."

Huston said, "Will you go out an' find Willie Eaton? He's chairman a the entertainment, ain't he?"

"Yeah."

"Well, tell 'im we wanta see 'im."

The boy went out, and he returned in a moment with a stringy Texas man. Willie Eaton had a long fragile jaw and dust-colored hair. His arms and legs were long and loose, and he had the gray sunburned eyes of the Panhandle. He stood in the tent, grinning, and his hands pivoted restlessly on his wrists.

Huston said, "You heard about tonight?"

Willie grinned. "Yeah!"

"Did anything 'bout it?"

"Yeah!"

"Tell what you done."

Willie Eaton grinned happily. "Well, sir, ordinary ent'tainment committee is five. I got twenty more—all good strong boys. They're a-gonna be a-dancin' an' a-keepin' their eyes open an' their ears open. First sign—any talk or argament, they close in tight. Worked her out purty nice. Can't even see nothing. Kinda move out, an' the fella will go out with 'em."

"Tell 'em they ain't to hurt the fellas."

Willie laughed gleefully. "I tol' 'em," he said.

"Well, tell 'em so they know."

"They know. Got five men out to the gate lookin' over the folks that comes in. Try to spot 'em 'fore they git started."

Huston stood up. His steel-colored eyes were stern. "Now you look here, Willie. We don't want them fellas hurt. They's gonna be deputies out by the front gate. If you blood 'em up, why—them deputies'll git you."

"Got that there figgered out," said Willie. "Take 'em out the back way, into the fiel'. Some a the boys'll see they git on their way."

"Well, it soun's awright," Huston said worriedly. "But don't you let nothing happen, Willie. You're responsible. Don' you hurt them fellas. Don' you use no stick nor no knife or arn, or nothing like

that."

"No, sir," said Willie. "We won't mark 'em."

Huston was suspicious. "I wisht I knowed I could trus' you, Willie. If you got to sock 'em, sock 'em where they won't bleed."

"Yes, sir!" said Willie.

"You sure of the fellas you picked?"

"Yes, sir."

"Awright. An' if she gits outa han', I'll be in the right-han' corner, this way on the dance floor."

Willie saluted in mockery and went out.

Huston said, "I dunno. I jes' hope Willie's boys don't kill nobody. What the hell the deputies want to hurt the camp for? Why can't they let us be?"

The sad boy from Unit Two said, "I lived out at Sunlan' Lan' an' Cattle Company's place. Honest to God, they got a cop for ever' ten people. Got one water faucet for 'bout two hundred people."

The tubby man said, "Jesus, God, Jeremy. You ain't got to tell me. I was there. They got a block of shacks—thirty-five of 'em in a row, an' fifteen deep. An' they got ten crappers for the whole shebang. An', Christ, you could smell 'em a mile. One of them deputies give me the lowdown. We was settin' aroun', an' he says, 'Them goddamn gov'ment camps,' he says. 'Give people hot water, an' they gonna want hot water. Give 'em flush toilets, an' they gonna want 'em.' He says, 'You give them goddamn Okies stuff like that an' they'll want 'em.' An' he says, 'They hol' red meetin's in them gov'ment camps. All figgerin' how to git on relief,' he says."

Huston asked, "Didn' nobody sock him?"

"No. They was a little fella, an' he says, 'What you mean, relief?'

"'I mean relief—what us taxpayers puts in an' you goddamn Okies takes out.'

"'We pay sales tax an' gas tax an' tobacco tax,' this little guy says. An' he says, 'Farmers get four cents a cotton poun' from the gov'ment—ain't that relief?' An' he says, 'Railroads an' shippin' companies draws subsidies—ain't that relief?'

"'They're doin' stuff got to be done,' this deputy says.

"'Well,' the little guy says, 'how'd your goddamn crops get picked if it wasn't for us?'" The tubby man looked around.

“What’d the deputy say?” Huston asked.

“Well, the deputy got mad. An’ he says, ‘You goddamn reds is all the time stirrin’ up trouble,’ he says. ‘You better come along with me.’ So he takes this little guy in, an’ they give him sixty days in jail for vagrancy.”

“How’d they do that if he had a job?” asked Timothy Wallace.

The tubby man laughed. “You know better’n that,” he said. “You know a vagrant is anybody a cop don’t like. An’ that’s why they hate this here camp. No cops can get in. This here’s United States, not California.”

Huston sighed. “Wisht we could stay here. Got to be goin’ ’fore long. I like this here. Folks gits along nice; an’, God Awmighty, why can’t they let us do it ’stead of keepin’ us miserable an’ puttin’ us in jail? I swear to God they gonna push us into fightin’ if they don’t quit a-worryin’ us.” Then he calmed his voice. “We jes’ got to keep peaceful,” he reminded himself. “The committee got no right to fly off’n the handle.”

The tubby man from Unit Three said, “Anybody that thinks this committee got all cheese an’ crackers ought to jes’ try her. They was a fight in my unit today—women. Got to callin’ names, an’ then got to throwin’ garbage. Ladies’ Committee couldn’ handle it, an’ they come to me. Want me to bring the fight in this here committee. I tol’ ’em they got to handle women trouble theirselves. This here committee ain’t gonna mess with no garbage fights.”

Huston nodded. “You done good,” he said.

And now the dusk was falling, and as the darkness deepened the practicing of the string band seemed to grow louder. The lights flashed on and two men inspected the patched wire to the dance floor. The children crowded thickly about the musicians. A boy with a guitar sang the “Down Home Blues,” chording delicately for himself, and on his second chorus three harmonicas and a fiddle joined him. From the tents the people streamed toward the platform, men in their clean blue denim and women in their ginghams. They came near to the platform and then stood quietly waiting, their faces bright and intent under the light.

Around the reservation there was a high wire fence, and along the fence, at intervals of fifty feet, the guards sat in the grass and waited.

Now the cars of the guests began to arrive, small farmers and their families, migrants from other camps. And as each guest came through the gate he mentioned the name of the camper who had invited him.

The string band took a reel tune up and played loudly, for they were not practicing any more. In front of their tents the Jesus-lovers sat and watched, their faces hard and contemptuous. They did not speak to one another, they watched for sin, and their faces condemned the whole proceeding.

At the Joad tent Ruthie and Winfield had bolted what little dinner they had, and then they started for the platform. Ma called them back, held up their faces with a hand under each chin, and looked into their nostrils, pulled their ears and looked inside, and sent them to the sanitary unit to wash their hands once more. They dodged around the back of the building and bolted for the platform, to stand among the children, close-packed about the band.

Al finished his dinner and spent half an hour shaving with Tom's razor. Al had a tight-fitting wool suit and a striped shirt, and he bathed and washed and combed his straight hair back. And when the washroom was vacant for a moment, he smiled engagingly at himself in the mirror, and he turned and tried to see himself in profile when he smiled. He slipped his purple arm-bands on and put on his tight coat. And he rubbed up his yellow shoes with a piece of toilet paper. A late bather came in, and Al hurried out and walked recklessly toward the platform, his eye peeled for girls. Near the dance floor he saw a pretty blond girl sitting in front of a tent. He sidled near and threw open his coat to show his shirt.

"Gonna dance tonight?" he asked.

The girl looked away and did not answer.

"Can't a fella pass a word with you? How 'bout you an' me dancin'?" And he said nonchalantly, "I can waltz."

The girl raised her eyes shyly, and she said, "That ain't nothin'—anybody can waltz."

"Not like me," said Al. The music surged, and he tapped one foot in time. "Come on," he said.

A very fat woman poked her head out of the tent and scowled at him. "You git along," she said fiercely. "This here girl's spoke for. She's a-gonna be married, an' her man's a-comin' for her."

Al winked rakishly at the girl, and he tripped on, striking his feet to the music and swaying his shoulders and swinging his arms. And the girl looked after him intently.

Pa put down his plate and stood up. “Come on, John,” he said; and he explained to Ma, “We’re a-gonna talk to some fellas about gettin’ work.” And Pa and Uncle John walked toward the manager’s house.

Tom worked a piece of store bread into the stew gravy on his plate and ate the bread. He handed his plate to Ma, and she put it in the bucket of hot water and washed it and handed it to Rose of Sharon to wipe. “Ain’t you goin’ to the dance?” Ma asked.

“Sure,” said Tom. “I’m on a committee. We’re gonna entertain some fellas.”

“Already on a committee?” Ma said. “I guess it’s ’cause you got work.”

Rose of Sharon turned to put the dish away. Tom pointed at her. “My God, she’s a-gettin’ big,” he said.

Rose of Sharon blushed and took another dish from Ma. “Sure she is,” Ma said.

“An’ she’s gettin’ prettier,” said Tom.

The girl blushed more deeply and hung her head. “You stop it,” she said, softly.

“’Course she is,” said Ma. “Girl with a baby always gets prettier.”

Tom laughed. “If she keeps a-swellin’ like this, she gonna need a wheelbarra to carry it.”

“Now you stop,” Rose of Sharon said, and she went inside the tent, out of sight.

Ma chuckled, “You shouldn’ ought to worry her.”

“She likes it,” said Tom.

“I know she likes it, but it worries her, too. And she’s a-mournin’ for Connie.”

“Well, she might’s well give him up. He’s prob’ly studyin’ to be President of the United States by now.”

“Don’t worry her,” Ma said. “She ain’t got no easy row to hoe.”

Willie Eaton moved near, and he grinned and said, “You Tom Joad?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, I’m Chairman the Entertainment Committee. We gonna need you. Fella tol’ me ’bout you.”

“Sure, I’ll play with you,” said Tom. “This here’s Ma.”

“Howdy,” said Willie.

“Glad to meet ya.”

Willie said, “Gonna put you on the gate to start, an’ then on the floor. Want ya to look over the guys when they come in, an’ try to spot ’em. You’ll be with another fella. Then later I want ya to dance an’ watch.”

“Yeah! I can do that awright,” said Tom.

Ma said apprehensively, “They ain’t no trouble?”

“No, ma’am,” Willie said. “They ain’t gonna be no trouble.”

“None at all,” said Tom. “Well, I’ll come ’long. See you at the dance, Ma.” The two young men walked quickly away toward the main gate.

Ma piled the washed dishes on a box. “Come on out,” she called, and when there was no answer, “Rosasharn, you come out.”

The girl stepped from the tent, and she went on with the dish-wiping.

“Tom was on’y jollyin’ ya.”

“I know. I didn’t mind; on’y I hate to have folks look at me.”

“Ain’t no way to he’p that. Folks gonna look. But it makes folks happy to see a girl in a fambly way—makes folks sort of giggly an’ happy. Ain’t you a-goin’ to the dance?”

“I was—but I don’ know. I wisht Connie was here.” Her voice rose. “Ma, I wisht he was here. I can’t hardly stan’ it.”

Ma looked closely at her. “I know,” she said. “But, Rosasharn—don’ shame your folks.”

“I don’ aim to, Ma.”

“Well, don’t you shame us. We got too much on us now, without no shame.”

The girl’s lip quivered. “I—I ain’ goin’ to the dance. I couldn’—Ma—he’p me!” She sat down and buried her head in her arms.

Ma wiped her hands on the dish towel and she squatted down in front of her daughter, and she put her two hands on Rose of Sharon’s hair. “You’re a good girl,” she said. “You always was a good girl. I’ll take care a you. Don’t you fret.” She put an interest in

her tone. “Know what you an’ me’s gonna do? We’re a-goin’ to that dance, an’ we’re a-gonna set there an’ watch. If anybody says to come dance—why, I’ll say you ain’t strong enough. I’ll say you’re poorly. An’ you can hear the music an’ all like that.”

Rose of Sharon raised her head. “You won’t let me dance?”

“No, I won’t.”

“An’ don’ let nobody touch me.”

“No, I won’t.”

The girl sighed. She said desperately, “I don’ know what I’m a-gonna do, Ma. I jus’ don’ know. I don’ know.”

Ma patted her knee. “Look,” she said. “Look here at me. I’m a-gonna tell ya. In a little while it ain’t gonna be so bad. In a little while. An’ that’s true. Now come on. We’ll go get washed up, an’ we’ll put on our nice dress an’ we’ll set by the dance.” She led Rose of Sharon toward the sanitary unit.

Pa and Uncle John squatted with a group of men by the porch of the office. “We nearly got work today,” Pa said. “We was jus’ a few minutes late. They awready got two fellas. An’, well, sir, it was a funny thing. They’s a straw boss there, an’ he says, ‘We jus’ got some two-bit men. ’Course we could use twenty-cent men. We can use a lot a twenty-cent men. You go to your camp an’ say we’ll put a lot a fellas on for twenty cents.’”

The squatting men moved nervously. A broad-shouldered man, his face completely in the shadow of a black hat, spatted his knee with his palm. “I know it, goddamn it!” he cried. “An’ they’ll git men. They’ll git hungry men. You can’t feed your fam’ly on twenty cents an hour, but you’ll take anything. They got you goin’ an’ comin’. They jes’ auction a job off. Jesus Christ, pretty soon they’re gonna make us pay to work.”

“We would of took her,” Pa said. “We ain’t had no job. We sure would a took her, but they was them guys in there, an’ the way they looked, we was scairt to take her.”

Black Hat said, “Get crazy thinkin’! I been workin’ for a fella, an’ he can’t pick his crop. Cost more jes’ to pick her than he can git for her, an’ he don’ know what to do.”

“Seems to me —” Pa stopped. The circle was silent for him. “Well —I jus’ thought, if a fella had a acre. Well, my woman she could raise a little truck an’ a couple pigs an’ some chickens. An’ us men

could get out an' find work, an' then go back. Kids could maybe go to school. Never seen sech schools as out here."

"Our kids ain't happy in them schools," Black Hat said.

"Why not? They're pretty nice, them schools."

"Well, a raggedy kid with no shoes, an' them other kids with socks on, an' nice pants, an' them a-yellin'Okie.' My boy went to school. Had a fight evr' day. Done good, too. Tough little bastard. Ever' day he got to fight. Come home with his clothes tore an' his nose bloody. An' his ma'd whale him. Made her stop that. No need ever'body beatin' the hell outa him, poor little fella. Jesus! He give some a them kids a goin'-over, though—them nice-pants sons-a-bitches. I dunno. I dunno."

Pa demanded, "Well, what the hell am I gonna do? We're outa money. One of my boys got a short job, but that won't feed us. I'm a-gonna go an' take twenty cents. I got to."

Black Hat raised his head, and his bristled chin showed in the light, and his stringy neck where the whiskers lay flat like fur. "Yeah!" he said bitterly. "You'll do that. An' I'm a two-bit man. You'll take my job for twenty cents. An' then I'll git hungry an' I'll take my job back for fifteen. Yeah! You go right on an' do her."

"Well, what the hell can I do?" Pa demanded. "I can't starve so's you can get two bits."

Black Hat dipped his head again, and his chin went into the shadow. "I dunno," he said. "I jes' dunno. It's bad enough to work twelve hours a day an' come out jes' a little bit hungry, but we got to figure all a time, too. My kid ain't gettin' enough to eat. I can't think all the time, goddamn it! It drives a man crazy." The circle of men shifted their feet nervously.

*

Tom stood at the gate and watched the people coming in to the dance. A floodlight shone down into their faces. Willie Eaton said, "Jes' keep your eyes open. I'm sendin' Jule Vitela over. He's half Cherokee. Nice fella. Keep your eyes open. An' see if you can pick out the ones."

"O.K.," said Tom. He watched the farm families come in, the girls with braided hair and the boys polished for the dance. Jule came and stood beside him.

“I’m with you,” he said.

Tom looked at the hawk nose and the high brown cheek bones and the slender receding chin. “They says you’re half Injun. You look all Injun to me.”

“No,” said Jule. “Jes’ half. Wisht I was a full-blood. I’d have my lan’ on the reservation. Them full-bloods got it pretty nice, some of ’em.”

“Look a them people,” Tom said.

The guests were moving in through the gateway, families from the farms, migrants from the ditch camps. Children straining to be free and quiet parents holding them back.

Jule said, “These here dances done funny things. Our people got nothing, but jes’ because they can ast their frien’s to come here to the dance, sets ’em up an’ makes ’em proud. An’ the folks respects ’em ’count of these here dances. Fella got a little place where I was a-workin’. He come to a dance here. I ast him myself, an’ he come. Says we got the only decent dance in the county, where a man can take his girls an’ his wife. Hey! Look.”

Three young men were coming through the gate—young working men in jeans. They walked close together. The guard at the gate questioned them, and they answered and passed through.

“Look at ’em careful,” Jule said. He moved to the guard. “Who ast them three?” he asked.

“Fella named Jackson, Unit Four.”

Jule came back to Tom. “I think them’s our fellas.”

“How ya know?”

“I dunno how. Jes’ got a feelin’. They’re kinda scared. Foller ’em an’ tell Willie to look ’em over, an’ tell Willie to check with Jackson, Unit Four. Get him to see if they’re all right. I’ll stay here.”

Tom strolled after the three young men. They moved toward the dance floor and took their positions quietly on the edge of the crowd. Tom saw Willie near the band and signaled him.

“What cha want?” Willie asked.

“Them three—see—there?”

“Yeah.”

“They say a fella name’ Jackson, Unit Four, ast ’em.”

Willie craned his neck and saw Huston and called him over.

“Them three fellas,” he said. “We better get Jackson, Unit Four, an’ see if he ast ’em.”

Huston turned on his heel and walked away; and in a few moments he was back with a lean and bony Kansan. “This here’s Jackson,” Huston said. “Look, Jackson, see them three young fellas —?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, did you ast ’em?”

“No.”

“Ever see ’em before?”

Jackson peered at them. “Sure. Worked at Gregorio’s with ’em.”

“So they knowed your name.”

“Sure. I worked right beside ’em.”

“Awright,” Huston said. “Don’t you go near ’em. We ain’t gonna th’ow ’em out if they’re nice. Thanks, Mr. Jackson.”

“Good work,” he said to Tom. “I guess them’s the fellas.”

“Jule picked ’em out,” said Tom.

“Hell, no wonder,” said Willie. “His Injun blood smelled ’em. Well, I’ll point ’em out to the boys.”

A sixteen-year-old boy came running through the crowd. He stopped, panting, in front of Huston. “Mista Huston,” he said. “I been like you said. They’s a car with six men parked down by the euc’lyptus trees, an’ they’s one with four men up that north-side road. I ast ’em for a match. They got guns. I seen ’em.”

Huston’s eyes grew hard and cruel. “Willie,” he said, “you sure you got ever’thing ready?”

Willie grinned happily. “Sure have, Mr. Huston. Ain’t gonna be no trouble.”

“Well, don’t hurt ’em. ’Member now. If you kin, quiet an’ nice, I kinda like to see ’em. Be in my tent.”

“I’ll see what we kin do,” said Willie.

Dancing had not formally started, but now Willie climbed onto the platform. “Choose up your squares,” he called. The music stopped. Boys and girls, young men and women, ran about until eight squares were ready on the big floor, ready and waiting. The girls held their hands in front of them and squirmed their fingers. The boys tapped their feet restlessly. Around the floor the old folks

sat, smiling slightly, holding the children back from the floor. And in the distance the Jesus-lovers sat with hard condemning faces and watched the sin.

Ma and Rose of Sharon sat on a bench and watched. And as each boy asked Rose of Sharon as partner, Ma said, “No, she ain’t well.” And Rose of Sharon blushed and her eyes were bright.

The caller stepped to the middle of the floor and held up his hands. “All ready? Then let her go!”

The music snarled out “Chicken Reel,” shrill and clear, fiddle skirling, harmonicas nasal and sharp, and the guitars booming on the bass strings. The caller named the turns, the squares moved. And they danced forward and back, hands ’round, swing your lady. The caller, in a frenzy, tapped his feet, strutted back and forth, went through the figures as he called them.

“Swing your ladies an’ a dol ce do. Join han’s roun’ an’ away we go.” The music rose and fell, and the moving shoes beating in time on the platform sounded like drums. “Swing to the right an’ a swing to lef’; break, now—break—back to—back,” the caller sang the high vibrant monotone. Now the girls’ hair lost the careful combing. Now perspiration stood out on the foreheads of the boys. Now the experts showed the tricky inter-steps. And the old people on the edge of the floor took up the rhythm, patted their hands softly, and tapped their feet; and they smiled gently and then caught one another’s eyes and nodded.

Ma leaned her head close to Rose of Sharon’s ear. “Maybe you wouldn’ think it, but your Pa was as nice a dancer as I ever seen, when he was young.” And Ma smiled. “Makes me think of ol’ times,” she said. And on the faces of the watchers the smiles were of old times.

“Up near Muskogee twenty years ago, they was a blin’ man with a fiddle——”

“I seen a fella oncet could slap his heels four times in one jump.”

“Swedes up in Dakota—know what they do sometimes? Put pepper on the floor. Gits up the ladies’ skirts an’ makes ’em purty lively—lively as a filly in season. Swedes do that sometimes.”

In the distance, the Jesus-lovers watched their restive children. “Look on sin,” they said. “Them folks is ridin’ to hell on a poker. It’s a shame the godly got to see it.” And their children were silent and

nervous.

"One more roun' an' then a little res'," the caller chanted. "Hit her hard, 'cause we're gonna stop soon." And the girls were damp and flushed, and they danced with open mouths and serious reverent faces, and the boys flung back their long hair and pranced, pointed their toes, and clicked their heels. In and out the squares moved, crossing, backing, whirling, and the music shrilled.

Then suddenly it stopped. The dancers stood still, panting with fatigue. And the children broke from restraint, dashed on the floor, chased one another madly, ran, slid, stole caps, and pulled hair. The dancers sat down, fanning themselves with their hands. The members of the band got up and stretched themselves and sat down again. And the guitar players worked softly over their strings.

Now Willie called, "Choose again for another square, if you can." The dancers scrambled to their feet and new dancers plunged forward for partners. Tom stood near the three young men. He saw them force their way through, out on the floor, toward one of the forming squares. He waved his hand at Willie, and Willie spoke to the fiddler. The fiddler squawked his bow across the strings. Twenty young men lounged slowly across the floor. The three reached the square. And one of them said, "I'll dance with this here."

A blond boy looked up in astonishment. "She's my partner."

"Listen, you little son-of-a-bitch——"

Off in the darkness a shrill whistle sounded. The three were walled in now. And each one felt the grip of hands. And then the wall of men moved slowly off the platform.

Willie yelped, "Le's go!" The music shrilled out, the caller intoned the figures, the feet thudded on the platform.

A touring car drove to the entrance. The driver called, "Open up. We hear you got a riot."

The guard kept his position. "We got no riot. Listen to that music. Who are you?"

"Deputy sheriffs."

"Got a warrant?"

"We don't need a warrant if there's a riot."

"Well, we got no riots here," said the gate guard.

The men in the car listened to the music and the sound of the caller, and then the car pulled slowly away and parked in a

crossroad and waited.

In the moving squad each of the three young men was pinioned, and a hand was over each mouth. When they reached the darkness the group opened up.

Tom said, “That sure was did nice.” He held both arms of his victim from behind.

Willie ran over to them from the dance floor. “Nice work,” he said. “On’y need six now. Huston wants to see these here fellers.”

Huston himself emerged from the darkness. “These the ones?”

“Sure,” said Jule. “Went right up an’ started it. But they didn’ even swing once.”

“Let’s look at ’em.” The prisoners were swung around to face him. Their heads were down. Huston put a flashlight beam in each sullen face. “What did you wanta do it for?” he asked. There was no answer. “Who the hell tol’ you to do it?”

“Goddarn it, we didn’ do nothing. We was jes’ gonna dance.”

“No, you wasn’t,” Jule said. “You was gonna sock that kid.”

Tom said, “Mr. Huston, jus’ when these here fellas moved in, somebody give a whistle.”

“Yeah, I know! The cops come right to the gate.” He turned back. “We ain’t gonna hurt you. Now who tol’ you to come bus’ up our dance?” He waited for a reply. “You’re our own folks,” Huston said sadly. “You belong with us. How’d you happen to come? We know all about it,” he added.

“Well, goddamn it, a fella got to eat.”

“Well, who sent you? Who paid you to come?”

“We ain’t been paid.”

“An’ you ain’t gonna be. No fight, no pay. Ain’t that right?”

One of the pinioned men said, “Do what you want. We ain’t gonna tell nothing.”

Huston’s head sank down for a moment, and then he said softly, “O.K. Don’t tell. But looka here. Don’t knife your own folks. We’re tryin’ to get along, havin’ fun an’ keepin’ order. Don’t tear all that down. Jes’ think about it. You’re jes’ harmin’ yourself.

“Awright, boys, put ’em over the back fence. An’ don’t hurt ’em. They don’t know what they’re doin’.”

The squad moved slowly toward the rear of the camp, and Huston

looked after them.

Jule said, “Le’s jes’ take one good kick at ’em.”

“No, you don’t!” Willie cried. “I said we wouldn’.”

“Jes’ one nice little kick,” Jule pleaded. “Jes’ loft ’em over the fence.”

“No, sir,” Willie insisted.

“Listen, you,” he said, “we’re lettin’ you off this time. But you take back the word. If ’n ever this here happens again, we’ll jes’ natcherally kick the hell outa whoever comes; we’ll bust ever’ bone in their body. Now you tell your boys that. Huston says you’re our kinda folks—maybe. I’d hate to think it.”

They neared the fence. Two of the seated guards stood up and moved over. “Got some fellas goin’ home early,” said Willie. The three men climbed over the fence and disappeared into the darkness.

And the squad moved quickly back toward the dance floor. And the music of “Ol’ Dan Tucker” skirled and whined from the string band.

Over near the office the men still squatted and talked, and the shrill music came to them.

Pa said, “They’s change a-comin’. I don’ know what. Maybe we won’t live to see her. But she’s a-comin’. They’s a res’less feelin’. Fella can’t figger nothin’ out, he’s so nervous.”

And Black Hat lifted his head up again, and the light fell on his bristly whiskers. He gathered some little rocks from the ground and shot them like marbles, with his thumb. “I don’ know. She’s a-comin’ awright, like you say. Fella tol’ me what happened in Akron, Ohio. Rubber companies. They got mountain people in ’cause they’d work cheap. An’ these here mountain people up an’ joined the union. Well, sir, hell jes’ popped. All them storekeepers and legioners an’ people like that, they get drillin’ an’ yellin’, ‘Red!’ An’ they’re gonna run the union right outa Akron. Preachers git a-preachin’ about it, an’ papers a-yowlin’, an’ they’s pick handles put out by the rubber companies, an’ they’re a-buyin’ gas. Jesus, you’d think them mountain boys was reg’lar devils!” He stopped and found some more rocks to shoot. “Well, sir—it was las’ March, an’ one Sunday five thousan’ of them mountain men had a turkey shoot outside a town. Five thousan’ of ’em jes’ marched through town

with their rifles. An' they had their turkey shoot, an' then they marched back. An' that's all they done. Well, sir, they ain't been no trouble sence then. These here citizens committees give back the pick handles, an' the storekeepers keep their stores, an' nobody been clubbed nor tarred an' feathered, an' nobody been killed." There was a long silence, and then Black Hat said, "They're gettin' purty mean out here. Burned that camp an' beat up folks. I been thinkin'. All our folks got guns. I been thinkin' maybe we ought to git up a turkey shootin' club an' have meetin's ever' Sunday."

The men looked up at him, and then down at the ground, and their feet moved restlessly and they shifted their weight from one leg to the other.

Chapter 25

The spring is beautiful in California. Valleys in which the fruit blossoms are fragrant pink and white waters in a shallow sea. Then the first tendrils of the grapes, swelling from the old gnarled vines, cascade down to cover the trunks. The full green hills are round and soft as breasts. And on the level vegetable lands are the mile-long rows of pale green lettuce and the spindly little cauliflowers, the gray-green unearthly artichoke plants.

And then the leaves break out on the trees, and the petals drop from the fruit trees and carpet the earth with pink and white. The centers of the blossoms swell and grow and color: cherries and apples, peaches and pears, figs which close the flower in the fruit. All California quickens with produce, and the fruit grows heavy, and the limbs bend gradually under the fruit so that little crutches must be placed under them to support the weight.

Behind the fruitfulness are men of understanding and knowledge and skill, men who experiment with seed, endlessly developing the techniques for greater crops of plants whose roots will resist the million enemies of the earth: the molds, the insects, the rusts, the blights. These men work carefully and endlessly to perfect the seed, the roots. And there are the men of chemistry who spray the trees against pests, who sulphur the grapes, who cut out disease and rots, mildews and sicknesses. Doctors of preventive medicine, men at the borders who look for fruit flies, for Japanese beetle, men who quarantine the sick trees and root them out and burn them, men of knowledge. The men who graft the young trees, the little vines, are the cleverest of all, for theirs is a surgeon's job, as tender and delicate; and these men must have surgeons' hands and surgeons' hearts to slit the bark, to place the grafts, to bind the wounds and cover them from the air. These are great men.

Along the rows, the cultivators move, tearing the spring grass and turning it under to make a fertile earth, breaking the ground to hold the water up near the surface, ridging the ground in little pools for the irrigation, destroying the weed roots that may drink the water away from the trees.

And all the time the fruit swells and the flowers break out in long clusters on the vines. And in the growing year the warmth grows

and the leaves turn dark green. The prunes lengthen like little green bird's eggs, and the limbs sag down against the crutches under the weight. And the hard little pears take shape, and the beginning of the fuzz comes out on the peaches. Grape blossoms shed their tiny petals and the hard little beads become green buttons, and the buttons grow heavy. The men who work in the fields, the owners of the little orchards, watch and calculate. The year is heavy with produce. And men are proud, for of their knowledge they can make the year heavy. They have transformed the world with their knowledge. The short, lean wheat has been made big and productive. Little sour apples have grown large and sweet, and that old grape that grew among the trees and fed the birds its tiny fruit has mothered a thousand varieties, red and black, green and pale pink, purple and yellow; and each variety with its own flavor. The men who work in the experimental farms have made new fruits: nectarines and forty kinds of plums, walnuts with paper shells. And always they work, selecting, grafting, changing, driving themselves, driving the earth to produce.

And first the cherries ripen. Cent and a half a pound. Hell, we can't pick 'em for that. Black cherries and red cherries, full and sweet, and the birds eat half of each cherry and the yellowjackets buzz into the holes the birds made. And on the ground the seeds drop and dry with black shreds hanging from them.

The purple prunes soften and sweeten. My God, we can't pick them and dry and sulphur them. We can't pay wages, no matter what wages. And the purple prunes carpet the ground. And first the skins wrinkle a little and swarms of flies come to feast, and the valley is filled with the odor of sweet decay. The meat turns dark and the crop shrivels on the ground.

And the pears grow yellow and soft. Five dollars a ton. Five dollars for forty fifty-pound boxes; trees pruned and sprayed, orchards cultivated—pick the fruit, put it in boxes, load the trucks, deliver the fruit to the cannery—forty boxes for five dollars. We can't do it. And the yellow fruit falls heavily to the ground and splashes on the ground. The yellowjackets dig into the soft meat, and there is a smell of ferment and rot.

Then the grapes—we can't make good wine. People can't buy good wine. Rip the grapes from the vines, good grapes, rotten grapes, wasp-stung grapes. Press stems, press dirt and rot.

But there's mildew and formic acid in the vats.

Add sulphur and tannic acid.

The smell from the ferment is not the rich odor of wine, but the smell of decay and chemicals.

Oh, well. It has alcohol in it, anyway. They can get drunk.

The little farmers watched debt creep up on them like the tide. They sprayed the trees and sold no crop, they pruned and grafted and could not pick the crop. And the men of knowledge have worked, have considered, and the fruit is rotting on the ground, and the decaying mash in the wine vats is poisoning the air. And taste the wine—no grape flavor at all, just sulphur and tannic acid and alcohol.

This little orchard will be a part of a great holding next year, for the debt will have choked the owner.

This vineyard will belong to the bank. Only the great owners can survive, for they own the canneries too. And four pears peeled and cut in half, cooked and canned, still cost fifteen cents. And the canned pears do not spoil. They will last for years.

The decay spreads over the State, and the sweet smell is a great sorrow on the land. Men who can graft the trees and make the seed fertile and big can find no way to let the hungry people eat their produce. Men who have created new fruits in the world cannot create a system whereby their fruits may be eaten. And the failure hangs over the State like a great sorrow.

The works of the roots of the vines, of the trees, must be destroyed to keep up the price, and this is the saddest, bitterest thing of all. Carloads of oranges dumped on the ground. The people came for miles to take the fruit, but this could not be. How would they buy oranges at twenty cents a dozen if they could drive out and pick them up? And men with hoses squirt kerosene on the oranges, and they are angry at the crime, angry at the people who have come to take the fruit. A million people hungry, needing the fruit—and kerosene sprayed over the golden mountains.

And the smell of rot fills the country.

Burn coffee for fuel in the ships. Burn corn to keep warm, it makes a hot fire. Dump potatoes in the rivers and place guards along the banks to keep the hungry people from fishing them out. Slaughter the pigs and bury them, and let the putrescence drip

down into the earth.

There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. And children dying of pellagra must die because a profit cannot be taken from an orange. And coroners must fill in the certificates—died of malnutrition—because the food must rot, must be forced to rot.

The people come with nets to fish for potatoes in the river, and the guards hold them back; they come in rattling cars to get the dumped oranges, but the kerosene is sprayed. And they stand still and watch the potatoes float by, listen to the screaming pigs being killed in a ditch and covered with quicklime, watch the mountains of oranges slop down to a putrefying ooze; and in the eyes of the people there is the failure; and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.

Chapter 26

In the Weedpatch camp, on an evening when the long, barred clouds hung over the set sun and inflamed their edges, the Joad family lingered after their supper. Ma hesitated before she started to do the dishes.

"We got to do somepin," she said. And she pointed at Winfield. "Look at 'im," she said. And when they stared at the little boy, "He's a-jerkin' an' a-twistin' in his sleep. Lookut his color." The members of the family looked at the earth again in shame. "Fried dough," Ma said. "One month we been here. An' Tom had five days' work. An' the rest of you scrabblin' out ever' day, an' no work. An' scairt to talk. An' the money gone. You're scairt to talk it out. Ever' night you jus' eat, an' then you get wanderin' away. Can't bear to talk it out. Well, you got to. Rosasharn ain't far from due, an' lookut her color. You got to talk it out. Now don't none of you get up till we figger somepin out. One day' more grease an' two days'flour, an' ten potatoes. You set here an' get busy!"

They looked at the ground. Pa cleaned his thick nails with his pocket knife. Uncle John picked at a splinter on the box he sat on. Tom pinched his lower lip and pulled it away from his teeth.

He released his lip and said softly, "We been a-lookin', Ma. Been walkin' out sence we can't use the gas no more. Been goin' in ever' gate, walkin' up to ever' house, even when we knowed they wasn't gonna be nothin'. Puts a weight on ya. Goin' out lookin' for somepin you know you ain't gonna find."

Ma said fiercely, "You ain't got the right to get discouraged. This here fambly's goin' under. You jus' ain't got the right."

Pa inspected his scraped nail. "We gotta go," he said. "We didn' wanta go. It's nice here, an' folks is nice here. We're feared we'll have to go live in one a them Hoovervilles."

"Well, if we got to, we got to. First thing is, we got to eat."

Al broke in. "I got a tankful a gas in the truck. I didn' let nobody get into that."

Tom smiled. "This here Al got a lot of sense along with he's randypandy."

"Now you figger," Ma said. "I ain't watchin' this here fambly

starve no more. One day' more grease. That's what we got. Come time for Rosasharn to lay in, she got to be fed up. You figger!"

"This here hot water an' toilets —" Pa began.

"Well, we can't eat no toilets."

Tom said, "They was a fella come by today lookin' for men to go to Marysville. Pickin' fruit."

"Well, why don' we go to Marysville?" Ma demanded.

"I dunno," said Tom. "Didn' seem right, somehow. He was so anxious. Wouldn' say how much the pay was. Said he didn' know exactly."

Ma said, "We're a-goin' to Marysville. I don' care what the pay is. We're a-goin'."

"It's too far," said Tom. "We ain't got the money for gasoline. We couldn' get there. Ma, you say we got to figger. I ain't done nothin' but figger the whole time."

Uncle John said, "Feller says they's cotton a-comin' in up north, near a place called Tulare. That ain't very far, the feller says."

"Well, we got to git goin', an' goin' quick. I ain't a-settin' here no longer, no matter how nice." Ma took up her bucket and walked toward the sanitary unit for hot water.

"Ma gets tough," Tom said. "I seen her a-gettin' mad quite a piece now. She jus' boils up."

Pa said with relief, "Well, she brang it into the open, anyways. I been layin' at night a-burnin' my brains up. Now we can talk her out, anyways."

Ma came back with her bucket of steaming water. "Well," she demanded, "figger anything out?"

"Jus' workin' her over," said Tom. "Now s'pose we jus' move up north where that cotton's at. We been over this here country. We know they ain't nothin' here. S'pose we pack up an' shove north. Then when the cotton's ready, we'll be there. I kinda like to get my han's aroun' some cotton. You got a full tank, Al?"

"Almos'—'bout two inches down."

"Should get us up to that place."

Ma poised a dish over the bucket. "Well?" she demanded.

Tom said, "You win. We'll move on, I guess. Huh, Pa?"

"Guess we got to," Pa said.

Ma glanced at him. “When?”

“Well—no need waitin’. Might’s well go in the mornin’.”

“We got to go in the mornin’. I tol’ you what’s lef’.”

“Now, Ma, don’ think I don’ wanta go. I ain’t had a good gutful to eat in two weeks. ’Course I filled up, but I didn’ take no good from it.”

Ma plunged the dish into the bucket. “We’ll go in the mornin’,” she said.

Pa sniffled. “Seems like times is changed,” he said sarcastically. “Time was when a man said what we’d do. Seems like women is tellin’ now. Seems like it’s purty near time to get out a stick.”

Ma put the clean dripping tin dish out on a box. She smiled down at her work. “You get your stick, Pa,” she said. “Times when they’s food an’ a place to set, then maybe you can use your stick an’ keep your skin whole. But you ain’t a-doin’ your job, either a-thinkin’ or a-workin’. If you was, why, you could use your stick, an’ women folks’d sniffle their nose an’ creep-mouse aroun’. But you jus’ get you a stick now an’ you ain’t lickin’ no woman; you’re a-fightin’, ’cause I got a stick all laid out too.”

Pa grinned with embarrassment. “Now it ain’t good to have the little fellas hear you talkin’ like that,” he said.

“You get some bacon inside the little fellas ’fore you come tellin’ what else is good for ’em,” said Ma.

Pa got up in disgust and moved away, and Uncle John followed him.

Ma’s hands were busy in the water, but she watched them go, and she said proudly to Tom, “He’s all right. He ain’t beat. He’s like as not to take a smack at me.”

Tom laughed. “You jus’ a-treadin’ him on?”

“Sure,” said Ma. “Take a man, he can get worried an’ worried, an’ it eats out his liver, an’ purty soon he’ll jus’ lay down and die with his heart et out. But if you can take an’ make ’im mad, why, he’ll be awright. Pa, he didn’ say nothin’, but he’s mad now. He’ll show me now. He’s awright.”

Al got up. “I’m gonna walk down the row,” he said.

“Better see the truck’s ready to go,” Tom warned him.

“She’s ready.”

“If she ain’t, I’ll turn Ma on ya.”

“She’s ready.” Al strolled jauntily along the row of tents.

Tom sighed. “I’m a-gettin’ tired, Ma. How ’bout makin’ me mad?”

“You got more sense, Tom. I don’ need to make you mad. I got to lean on you. Them others—they’re kinda strangers, all but you. You won’t give up, Tom.”

The job fell on him. “I don’ like it,” he said. “I wanta go out like Al. An’ I wanta get mad like Pa, an’ I wanta get drunk like Uncle John.”

Ma shook her head. “You can’t, Tom. I know. I knowed from the time you was a little fella. You can’t. They’s some folks that’s just theirself an’ nothin’ more. There’s Al—he’s jus’ a young fella after a girl. You wasn’t never like that, Tom.”

“Sure I was,” said Tom. “Still am.”

“No you ain’t. Ever’thing you do is more’n you. When they sent you up to prison I knowed it. You’re spoke for.”

“Now, Ma—cut it out. It ain’t true. It’s all in your head.”

She stacked the knives and forks on top of the plates. “Maybe. Maybe it’s in my head. Rosasharn, you wipe up these here an’ put ’em away.”

The girl got breathlessly to her feet and her swollen middle hung out in front of her. She moved sluggishly to the box and picked up a washed dish.

Tom said, “Gettin’ so tightful it’s a-pullin’ her eyes wide.”

“Don’t you go a-jollyin’,” said Ma. “She’s doin’ good. You go ’long an’ say goo’-by to anybody you wan’.”

“O.K.,” he said. “I’m gonna see how far it is up there.”

Ma said to the girl, “He ain’t sayin’ stuff like that to make you feel bad. Where’s Ruthie an’ Winfiel’?”

“They snuck off after Pa. I seen ’em.”

“Well, leave ’em go.”

Rose of Sharon moved sluggishly about her work. Ma inspected her cautiously. “You feelin’ pretty good? Your cheeks is kinda saggy.”

“I ain’t had milk like they said I ought.”

“I know. We jus’ didn’ have no milk.”

Rose of Sharon said dully, “Ef Connie hadn’ went away, we’d a

had a little house by now, with him studyin' an' all. Would a got milk like I need. Would a had a nice baby. This here baby ain't gonna be no good. I ought a had milk." She reached in her apron pocket and put something into her mouth.

Ma said, "I seen you nibblin' on somepin. What you eatin'?"

"Nothin'."

"Come on, what you nibblin' on?"

"Jus' a piece a slack lime. Foun' a big hunk."

"Why, tha's jus' like eatin' dirt."

"I kinda feel like I wan' it."

Ma was silent. She spread her knees and tightened her skirt. "I know," she said at last. "I et coal oncet when I was in a fambly way. Et a big piece a coal. Granma says I shouldn'. Don' you say that about the baby. You got no right even to think it."

"Got no husban'! Got no milk!"

Ma said, "If you was a well girl, I'd take a whang at you. Right in the face." She got up and went inside the tent. She came out and stood in front of Rose of Sharon, and she held out her hand. "Look!" The small gold earrings were in her hand. "These is for you."

The girl's eyes brightened for a moment, and then she looked aside. "I ain't pierced."

"Well, I'm a-gonna pierce ya." Ma hurried back into the tent. She came back with a cardboard box. Hurriedly she threaded a needle, doubled the thread and tied a series of knots in it. She threaded a second needle and knotted the thread. In the box she found a piece of cork.

"It'll hurt. It'll hurt."

Ma stepped to her, put the cork in back of the ear lobe and pushed the needle through the ear, into the cork.

The girl twitched. "It sticks. It'll hurt."

"No more'n that."

"Yes, it will."

"Well, then. Le's see the other ear first." She placed the cork and pierced the other ear.

"It'll hurt."

"Hush!" said Ma. "It's all done."

Rose of Sharon looked at her in wonder. Ma clipped the needles

off and pulled one knot of each thread through the lobes.

"Now," she said. "Ever' day we'll pull one knot, and in a couple weeks it'll be all well an' you can wear 'em. Here—they're your'n now. You can keep 'em."

Rose of Sharon touched her ears tenderly and looked at the tiny spots of blood on her fingers. "It didn' hurt. Jus' stuck a little."

"You oughta been pierced long ago," said Ma. She looked at the girl's face, and she smiled in triumph. "Now get them dishes all done up. Your baby gonna be a good baby. Very near let you have a baby without your ears was pierced. But you're safe now."

"Does it mean somepin?"

"Why, 'course it does," said Ma. "'Course it does."

Al strolled down the street toward the dancing platform. Outside a neat little tent he whistled softly, and then moved along the street. He walked to the edge of the grounds and sat down in the grass.

The clouds over the west had lost the red edging now, and the cores were black. Al scratched his legs and looked toward the evening sky.

In a few moments a blond girl walked near; she was pretty and sharp-featured. She sat down in the grass beside him and did not speak. Al put his hand on her waist and walked his fingers around.

"Don't," she said. "You tickle."

"We're goin' away tomorra," said Al.

She looked at him, startled. "Tomorra? Where?"

"Up north," he said lightly.

"Well, we're gonna git married, ain't we?"

"Sure, sometime."

"You said purty soon!" she cried angrily.

"Well, soon is when soon comes."

"You promised." He walked his fingers around farther.

"Git away," she cried. "You said we was."

"Well, sure we are."

"An' now you're goin' away."

Al demanded, "What's the matter with you? You in a fambly way?"

"No, I ain't."

Al laughed. "I jus' been wastin' my time, huh?"

Her chin shot out. She jumped to her feet. "You git away from me, Al Joad. I don' wanta see you no more."

"Aw, come on. What's the matter?"

"You think you're jus'—hell on wheels."

"Now wait a minute."

"You think I got to go out with you. Well, I don't! I got lots a chances."

"Now wait a minute."

"No, sir—you git away."

Al lunged suddenly, caught her by the ankle, and tripped her. He grabbed her when she fell and held her and put his hand over her angry mouth. She tried to bite his palm, but he cupped it out over her mouth, and he held her down with his other arm. And in a moment she lay still, and in another moment they were giggling together in the dry grass.

"Why, we'll be a-comin' back purty soon," said Al. "An' I'll have a pocketful a jack. We'll go down to Hollywood an' see the pitchers."

She was lying on her back. Al bent over her. And he saw the bright evening star reflected in her eyes, and he saw the black cloud reflected in her eyes. "We'll go on the train," he said.

"How long ya think it'll be?" she asked.

"Oh, maybe a month," he said.

The evening dark came down and Pa and Uncle John squatted with the heads of families out by the office. They studied the night and the future. The little manager, in his white clothes, frayed and clean, rested his elbows on the porch rail. His face was drawn and tired.

Huston looked up at him. "You better get some sleep, mister."

"I guess I ought. Baby born last night in Unit Three. I'm getting to be a good midwife."

"Fella oughta know," said Huston. "Married fella got to know."

Pa said, "We're a-gittin' out in the mornin'."

"Yeah? Which way you goin'?"

"Thought we'd go up north a little. Try to get in the first cotton.

We ain't had work. We're outa food."

"Know if they's any work?" Huston asked.

"No, but we're sure they ain't none here."

"They will be, a little later," Huston said. "We'll hold on."

"We hate to go," said Pa. "Folks been so nice here—an' the toilets an' all. But we got to eat. Got a tank of gas. That'll get us a little piece up the road. We had a bath ever' day here. Never was so clean in my life. Funny thing—use ta be I on'y got a bath ever' week an' I never seemed to stink. But now if I don't get one ever' day I stink. Wonder if takin' a bath so often makes that?"

"Maybe you couldn't smell yourself before," the manager said.

"Maybe. I wisht we could stay."

The little manager held his temples between his palms. "I think there's going to be another baby tonight," he said.

"We gonna have one in our fambly 'fore long," said Pa. "I wisht we could have it here. I sure wisht we could."

Tom and Willie and Jule the half-breed sat on the edge of the dance floor and swung their feet.

"I got a sack of Durham," Jule said. "Like a smoke?"

"I sure would," said Tom. "Ain't had a smoke for a hell of a time." He rolled the brown cigarette carefully, to keep down the loss of tobacco.

"Well, sir, we'll be sorry to see you go," said Willy. "You folks is good folks."

Tom lighted his cigarette. "I been thinkin' about it a lot. Jesus Christ, I wisht we could settle down."

Jule took back his Durham. "It ain't nice," he said. "I got a little girl. Thought when I come out here she'd get some schoolin'. But hell, we ain't in one place hardly long enough. Jes' gits goin' an' we got to drag on."

"I hope we don't get in no more Hoovervilles," said Tom. "I was really scairt, there."

"Deputies push you aroun'?"

"I was scairt I'd kill somebody," said Tom. "Was on'y there a little while, but I was a-stewin' aroun' the whole time. Depity come in an' picked up a frien', jus' because he talked outa turn. I was jus'

stewin' all the time."

"Ever been in a strike?" Willie asked.

"No."

"Well, I been a-thinkin' a lot. Why don' them depities get in here an' raise hell like ever' place else? Think that little guy in the office is a-stoppin' 'em? No, sir."

"Well, what is?" Jule asked.

"I'll tell ya. It's 'cause we're all a-workin' together. Depity can't pick on one fella in this camp. He's pickin' on the whole darn camp. An' he don't dare. All we got to do is give a yell an' they's two hunderd men out. Fella organizin' for the union was a-talkin' out on the road. He says we could do that any place. Jus' stick together. They ain't raisin' hell with no two hunderd men. They're pickin' on one man."

"Yeah," said Jule, "an' suppose you got a union? You got to have leaders. They'll jus' pick up your leaders, an' where's your union?"

"Well," said Willie, "we got to figure her out some time. I been out here a year, an' wages is goin' right on down. Fella can't feed his fam'ly on his work now, an' it's gettin' worse all the time. It ain't gonna do no good to set aroun' an' starve. I don' know what to do. If a fella owns a team a horses, he don't raise no hell if he got to feed 'em when they ain't workin'. But if a fella got men workin' for him, he jus' don't give a damn. Horses is a hell of a lot more worth than men. I don' understan' it."

"Gets so I don' wanta think about it," said Jule. "An' I got to think about it. I got this here little girl. You know how purty she is. One week they give her a prize in this camp 'cause she's so purty. Well, what's gonna happen to her? She's gettin' spindly. I ain't gonna stan' it. She's so purty. I'm gonna bust out."

"How?" Willie asked. "What you gonna do—steal some stuff an' git in jail? Kill somebody an' git hung?"

"I don' know," said Jule. "Gits me nuts thinkin' about it. Gets me clear nuts."

"I'm a-gonna miss them dances," Tom said. "Them was some of the nicest dances I ever seen. Well, I'm gonna turn in. So long. I'll be seein' you someplace." He shook hands.

"Sure will," said Jule.

"Well, so long." Tom moved away into the darkness.

*

In the darkness of the Joad tent Ruthie and Winfield lay on their mattress, and Ma lay beside them. Ruthie whispered, “Ma!”

“Yeah? Ain’t you asleep yet?”

“Ma—they gonna have croquet where we’re goin’?”

“I don’ know. Get some sleep. We want to get an early start.”

“Well, I wisht we’d stay here where we’re sure we got croquet.”

“Sh!” said Ma.

“Ma, Winfiel’ hit a kid tonight.”

“He shouldn’ of.”

“I know. I tol’ ’im, but he hit the kid right in the nose an’, Jesus, how the blood run down!”

“Don’ talk like that. It ain’t a nice way to talk.”

Winfield turned over. “That kid says we was Okies,” he said in an outraged voice. “He says he wasn’t no Okie ’cause he come from Oregon. Says we was goddamn Okies. I socked him.”

“Sh! You shouldn’. He can’t hurt you callin’ names.”

“Well, I won’t let ’im,” Winfield said fiercely.

“Sh! Get some sleep.”

Ruthie said, “You oughta seen the blood run down—all over his clothes.”

Ma reached a hand from under the blanket and snapped Ruthie on the cheek with her finger. The little girl went rigid for a moment, and then dissolved into sniffling, quiet crying.

In the sanitary unit Pa and Uncle John sat in adjoining compartments. “Might’s well get in a good las’ one,” said Pa. “It’s sure nice. ’Member how the little fellas was so scairt when they flushed ’em the first time?”

“I wasn’t so easy myself,” said Uncle John. He pulled his overalls neatly up around his knees. “I’m gettin’ bad,” he said. “I feel sin.”

“You can’t sin none,” said Pa. “You ain’t got no money. Jus’ sit tight. Cos’ you at leas’ two bucks to sin, an’ we ain’t got two bucks amongst us.”

“Yeah! But I’m a-thinkin’ sin.”

“Awright. You can think sin for nothin’.”

"It's jus' as bad," said Uncle John.

"It's a whole hell of a lot cheaper," said Pa.

"Don't you go makin' light of sin."

"I ain't. You jus' go ahead. You always gets sinful jus' when hell's a-poppin'."

"I know it," said Uncle John. "Always was that way. I never tol' half the stuff I done."

"Well, keep it to yaself."

"These here nice toilets gets me sinful."

"Go out in the bushes then. Come on, pull up ya pants an' le's get some sleep." Pa pulled his overall straps in place and snapped the buckle. He flushed the toilet and watched thoughtfully while the water whirled in the bowl.

It was still dark when Ma roused her camp. The low night lights shone through the open doors of the sanitary units. From the tents along the road came the assorted snores of the campers.

Ma said, "Come on, roll out. We got to be on our way. Day's not far off." She raised the screechy shade of the lantern and lighted the wick. "Come on, all of you."

The floor of the tent squirmed into slow action. Blankets and comforts were thrown back and sleepy eyes squinted blindly at the light. Ma slipped on her dress over the underclothes she wore to bed. "We got no coffee," she said. "I got a few biscuits. We can eat 'em on the road. Jus' get up now, an' we'll load the truck. Come on now. Don't make no noise. Don' wanta wake the neighbors."

It was a few moments before they were fully aroused. "Now don' you get away," Ma warned the children. The family dressed. The men pulled down the tarpaulin and loaded up the truck. "Make it nice an'flat," Ma warned them. They piled the mattress on top of the load and bound the tarpaulin in place over its ridge pole.

"Awright, Ma," said Tom. "She's ready."

Ma held a plate of cold biscuits in her hand. "Awright. Here. Each take one. It's all we got."

Ruthie and Winfield grabbed their biscuits and climbed up on the load. They covered themselves with a blanket and went back to sleep, still holding the cold hard biscuits in their hands. Tom got into the driver's seat and stepped on the starter. It buzzed a little,

and then stopped.

"Goddamn you, Al!" Tom cried. "You let the battery run down."

Al blustered, "How the hell was I gonna keep her up if I ain't got gas to run her?"

Tom chuckled suddenly. "Well, I don' know how, but it's your fault. You got to crank her."

"I tell you it ain't my fault."

Tom got out and found the crank under the seat. "It's my fault," he said.

"Gimme that crank." Al seized it. "Pull down the spark so she don't take my arm off."

"O.K. Twist her tail."

Al labored at the crank, around and around. The engine caught, spluttered, and roared as Tom choked the car delicately. He raised the spark and reduced the throttle.

Ma climbed in beside him. "We woke up ever'body in the camp," she said.

"They'll go to sleep again."

Al climbed in on the other side. "Pa 'n' Uncle John got up top," he said. "Goin' to sleep again."

Tom drove toward the main gate. The watchman came out of the office and played his flashlight on the truck. "Wait a minute."

"What ya want?"

"You checkin' out?"

"Sure."

"Well, I got to cross you off."

"O.K."

"Know which way you're goin'?"

"Well, we're gonna try up north."

"Well, good luck," said the watchman.

"Same to you. So long."

The truck edged slowly over the big hump and into the road. Tom retraced the road he had driven before, past Weedpatch and west until he came to 99, then north on the great paved road, toward Bakersfield. It was growing light when he came into the outskirts of the city.

Tom said, “Ever’ place you look is restaurants. An’ them places all got coffee. Lookit that all-nighter there. Bet they got ten gallons a coffee in there, all hot!”

“Aw, shut up,” said Al.

Tom grinned over at him. “Well, I see you got yaself a girl right off.”

“Well, what of it?”

“He’s mean this mornin’, Ma. He ain’t good company.”

Al said irritably, “I’m goin’ out on my own purty soon. Fella can make his way lot easier if he ain’t got a fambly.”

Tom said, “You’d have yaself a fambly in nine months. I seen you playin’ aroun’.”

“Ya crazy,” said Al. “I’d get myself a job in a garage an’ I’d eat in restaurants——”

“An’ you’d have a wife an’ kid in nine months.”

“I tell ya I wouldn’.”

Tom said, “You’re a wise guy, Al. You gonna take some beatin’ over the head.”

“Who’s gonna do it?”

“They’ll always be guys to do it,” said Tom.

“You think jus’ because you——”

“Now you jus’ stop that,” Ma broke in.

“I done it,” said Tom. “I was a-badgerin’ him. I didn’ mean no harm, Al. I didn’ know you liked that girl so much.”

“I don’t like no girls much.”

“Awright, then, you don’t. You ain’t gonna get no argument out of me.”

The truck came to the edge of the city. “Look a them hotdog stan’s—hunderds of ’em,” said Tom.

Ma said, “Tom! I got a dollar put away. You wan’ coffee bad enough to spen’ it?”

“No, Ma. I’m jus’ foolin’.”

“You can have it if you wan’ it bad enough.”

“I wouldn’ take it.”

Al said, “Then shut up about coffee.”

Tom was silent for a time. “Seems like I got my foot in it all the

time," he said. "There's the road we run up that night."

"I hope we don't never have nothin' like that again," said Ma. "That was a bad night."

"I didn' like it none either."

The sun rose on their right, and the great shadow of the truck ran beside them, flicking over the fence posts beside the road. They ran on past the rebuilt Hooverville.

"Look," said Tom. "They got new people there. Looks like the same place."

Al came slowly out of his sullenness. "Fella tol' me some a them people been burned out fifteen-twenty times. Says they jus' go hide down the willows an' then they come out an' build 'em another weed shack. Jus' like gophers. Got so use' to it they don't even get mad no more, this fella says. They jus' figger it's like bad weather."

"Sure was bad weather for me that night," said Tom. They moved up the wide highway. And the sun's warmth made them shiver. "Gettin' snappy in the mornin'," said Tom. "Winter's on the way. I jus' hope we can get some money 'fore it comes. Tent ain't gonna be nice in the winter."

Ma sighed, and then she straightened her head. "Tom," she said, "we gotta have a house in the winter. I tell ya we got to. Ruthie's awright, but Winfiel' ain't so strong. We got to have a house when the rains come. I heard it jus' rains cats aroun' here."

"We'll get a house, Ma. You res' easy. You gonna have a house."

"Jus' so's it's got a roof an' a floor. Jus' to keep the little fellas off 'n the groun'."

"We'll try, Ma."

"I don' wanna worry ya now."

"We'll try, Ma."

"I jus' get panicky sometimes," she said. "I jus' lose my spunk."

"I never seen you when you lost it."

"Nights I do, sometimes."

There came a harsh hissing from the front of the truck. Tom grabbed the wheel tight and he thrust the brake down to the floor. The truck bumped to a stop. Tom sighed. "Well, there she is." He leaned back in the seat. Al leaped out and ran to the right front tire.

"Great big nail," he called.

“We got any tire patch?”

“No,” said Al. “Used it all up. Got patch, but no glue stuff.”

Tom turned and smiled sadly at Ma. “You shouldn’ a tol’ about that dollar,” he said. “We’d a fixed her some way.” He got out of the car and went to the flat tire.

Al pointed to a big nail protruding from the flat casing. “There she is!”

“If they’s one nail in the county, we run over it.”

“Is it bad?” Ma called.

“No, not bad, but we got to fix her.”

The family piled down from the top of the truck. “Puncture?” Pa asked, and then he saw the tire and was silent.

Tom moved Ma from the seat and got the can of tire patch from underneath the cushion. He unrolled the rubber patch and took out the tube of cement, squeezed it gently. “She’s almos’ dry,” he said. “Maybe they’s enough. Awright, Al. Block the back wheels. Le’s get her jacked up.”

Tom and Al worked well together. They put stones behind the wheels, put the jack under the front axle, and lifted the weight off the limp casing. They ripped off the casing. They found the hole, dipped a rag in the gas tank and washed the tube around the hole. And then, while Al held the tube tight over his knee, Tom tore the cement tube in two and spread the little fluid thinly on the rubber with his pocket knife. He scraped the gum delicately. “Now let her dry while I cut a patch.” He trimmed and beveled the edge of the blue patch. Al held the tube tight while Tom put the patch tenderly in place. “There! Now bring her to the running board while I tap her with a hammer.” He pounded the patch carefully, then stretched the tube and watched the edges of the patch. “There she is! She’s gonna hold. Stick her on the rim an’ we’ll pump her up. Looks like you keep your buck, Ma.”

Al said, “I wisht we had a spare. We got to get us a spare, Tom, on a rim an’ all pumped up. Then we can fix a puncture at night.”

“When we get money for a spare we’ll get us some coffee an’ side-meat instead,” Tom said.

The light morning traffic buzzed by on the highway, and the sun grew warm and bright. A wind, gentle and sighing, blew in puffs from the southwest, and the mountains on both sides of the great

valley were indistinct in a pearly mist.

Tom was pumping at the tire when a roadster, coming from the north, stopped on the other side of the road. A brown-faced man dressed in a light gray business suit got out and walked across to the truck. He was bareheaded. He smiled, and his teeth were very white against his brown skin. He wore a massive gold wedding ring on the third finger of his left hand. A little gold football hung on a slender chain across his vest.

"Morning," he said pleasantly.

Tom stopped pumping and looked up. "Mornin'."

The man ran his fingers through his coarse, short, graying hair. "You people looking for work?"

"We sure are, mister. Lookin' even under boards."

"Can you pick peaches?"

"We never done it," Pa said.

"We can do anything," Tom said hurriedly. "We can pick anything there is."

The man fingered his gold football. "Well, there's plenty of work for you about forty miles north."

"We'd sure admire to get it," said Tom. "You tell us how to get there, an' we'll go a-lopin'."

"Well, you go north to Pixley, that's thirty-five or -six miles, and you turn east. Go about six miles. Ask anybody where the Hooper ranch is. You'll find plenty of work there."

"We sure will."

"Know where there's other people looking for work?"

"Sure," said Tom. "Down at the Weedpatch camp they's plenty lookin' for work."

"I'll take a run down there. We can use quite a few. Remember now, turn east at Pixley and keep straight east to the Hooper ranch."

"Sure," said Tom. "An' we thank ya, mister. We need work awful bad."

"All right. Get along as soon as you can." He walked back across the road, climbed into his open roadster, and drove away south.

Tom threw his weight on the pump. "Twenty apiece," he called. "One—two—three—four—" At twenty Al took the pump, and then

Pa and then Uncle John. The tire filled out and grew plump and smooth. Three times around, the pump went. “Let ’er down an’ le’s see,” said Tom.

Al released the jack and lowered the car. “Got plenty,” he said. “Maybe a little too much.”

They threw the tools into the car. “Come on, le’s go,” Tom called. “We’re gonna get some work at last.”

Ma got in the middle again. Al drove this time.

“Now take her easy. Don’t burn her up, Al.”

They drove on through the sunny morning fields. The mist lifted from the hilltops and they were clear and brown, with black-purple creases. The wild doves flew up from the fences as the truck passed. Al unconsciously increased his speed.

“Easy,” Tom warned him. “She’ll blow up if you crowd her. We got to get there. Might even get in some work today.”

Ma said excitedly, “With four men a-workin’ maybe I can get some credit right off. Fust thing I’ll get is coffee, ’cause you been wanting that, an’ then some flour an’ bakin’ powder an’ some meat. Better not get no side-meat right off. Save that for later. Maybe Sat’dy. An’ soap. Got to get soap. Wonder where we’ll stay.” She babbled on. “An’ milk. I’ll get some milk ’cause Rosasharn, she ought to have milk. The lady nurse says that.”

A snake wriggled across the warm highway. Al zipped over and ran it down and came back to his own lane.

“Gopher snake,” said Tom. “You oughtn’t to done that.”

“I hate ’em,” said Al gaily. “Hate all kinds. Give me the stomach-quake.”

The forenoon traffic on the highway increased, salesmen in shiny coupés with the insignia of their companies painted on the doors, red and white gasoline trucks dragging clinking chains behind them, great square-doored vans from wholesale grocery houses, delivering produce. The country was rich along the roadside. There were orchards, heavy leafed in their prime, and vineyards with the long green crawlers carpeting the ground between the rows. There were melon patches and grain fields. White houses stood in the greenery, roses growing over them. And the sun was gold and warm.

In the front seat of the truck Ma and Tom and Al were overcome

with happiness. “I ain’t really felt so good for a long time,” Ma said. “’F we pick plenty peaches we might get a house, pay rent even, for a couple months. We got to have a house.”

Al said, “I’m a-gonna save up. I’ll save up an’ then I’m a-goin’ in a town an’ get me a job in a garage. Live in a room an’ eat in restaurants. Go to the movin’ pitchers ever’ damn night. Don’ cost much. Cowboy pitchers.” His hands tightened on the wheel.

The radiator bubbled and hissed steam. “Did you fill her up?” Tom asked.

“Yeah. Wind’s kinda behind us. That’s what makes her boil.”

“It’s a awful nice day,” Tom said. “Use’ ta work there in McAlester an’ think all the things I’d do. I’d go in a straight line way to hell an’ gone an’ never stop nowheres. Seems like a long time ago. Seems like it’s years ago I was in. They was a guard made it tough. I was gonna lay for ’im. Guess that’s what makes me mad at cops. Seems like ever’ cop got his face. He use’ ta get red in the face. Looked like a pig. Had a brother out west, they said. Use’ ta get fellas paroled to his brother, an’ then they had to work for nothin’. If they raised a stink, they’d get sent back for breakin’ parole. That’s what the fellers said.”

“Don’ think about it,” Ma begged him. “I’m a-gonna lay in a lot a stuff to eat. Lot a flour an’ lard.”

“Might’s well think about it,” said Tom. “Try to shut it out, an’ it’ll whang back at me. They was a screwball. Never tol’ you ’bout him. Looked like Happy Hooligan. Harmless kinda fella. Always was gonna make a break. Fellas all called him Hooligan.” Tom laughed to himself.

“Don’ think about it,” Ma begged.

“Go on,” said Al. “Tell about the fella.”

“It don’t hurt nothin’, Ma,” Tom said. “This fella was always gonna break out. Make a plan, he would; but he couldn’ keep it to himself an’ purty soon ever’body knowed it, even the warden. He’d make his break an’ they’d take ’im by the han’ an’ lead ’im back. Well, one time he drawed a plan where he’s goin’ over. ’Course he showed it aroun’, an’ ever’body kep’ still. An’ he hid out, an’ ever’body kep’ still. So he’s got himself a rope somewheres, an’ he goes over the wall. They’s six guards outside with a great big sack, an’ Hooligan comes quiet down the rope an’ they jus’ hol’ the sack

out an' he goes right inside. They tie up the mouth an' take 'im back inside. Fellas laughed so hard they like to died. But it busted Hooligan's spirit. He jus' cried an' cried, an' moped aroun' an' got sick. Hurt his feelin's so bad. Cut his wrists with a pin an' bled to death 'cause his feelin's was hurt. No harm in 'im at all. They's all kinds a screwballs in stir."

"Don' talk about it," Ma said. "I knowed Purty Boy Floyd's ma. He wan't a bad boy. Jus' got drove in a corner."

The sun moved up toward noon and the shadow of the truck grew lean and moved in under the wheels.

"Mus' be Pixley up the road," Al said. "Seen a sign a little back." They drove into the little town and turned eastward on a narrower road. And the orchards lined the way and made an aisle.

"Hope we can find her easy," Tom said.

Ma said, "That fella said the Hooper ranch. Said anybody'd tell us. Hope they's a store near by. Might get some credit, with four men workin'. I could get a real nice supper if they'd gimme some credit. Make up a big stew maybe."

"An' coffee," said Tom. "Might even get me a sack a Durham. I ain't had no tobacca of my own for a long time."

Far ahead the road was blocked with cars, and a line of white motorcycles was drawn up along the roadside. "Mus' be a wreck," Tom said.

As they drew near a State policeman, in boots and Sam Browne belt, stepped around the last parked car. He held up his hand and Al pulled to a stop. The policeman leaned confidentially on the side of the car. "Where you going?"

Al said, "Fella said they was work pickin' peaches up this way."

"Want to work, do you?"

"Damn right," said Tom.

"O.K. Wait here a minute." He moved to the side of the road and called ahead. "One more. That's six cars ready. Better take this batch through."

Tom called, "Hey! What's the matter?"

The patrol man lounged back. "Got a little trouble up ahead. Don't you worry. You'll get through. Just follow the line."

There came the splattering blast of motorcycles starting. The line

of cars moved on, with the Joad truck last. Two motorcycles led the way, and two followed.

Tom said uneasily, “I wonder what’s a matter.”

“Maybe the road’s out,” Al suggested.

“Don’ need four cops to lead us. I don’ like it.”

The motorcycles ahead speeded up. The line of old cars speeded up. Al hurried to keep in back of the last car.

“These here is our own people, all of ’em,” Tom said. “I don’ like this.”

Suddenly the leading policemen turned off the road into a wide graveled entrance. The old cars whipped after them. The motorcycles roared their motors. Tom saw a line of men standing in the ditch beside the road, saw their mouths open as though they were yelling, saw their shaking fists and their furious faces. A stout woman ran toward the cars, but a roaring motorcycle stood in her way. A high wire gate swung open. The six old cars moved through and the gate closed behind them. The four motorcycles turned and sped back in the direction from which they had come. And now that the motors were gone, the distant yelling of the men in the ditch could be heard. Two men stood beside the graveled road. Each one carried a shotgun.

One called, “Go on, go on. What the hell are you waiting for?” The six cars moved ahead, turned a bend and came suddenly on the peach camp.

There were fifty little square, flat-roofed boxes, each with a door and a window, and the whole group in a square. A water tank stood high on one edge of the camp. And a little grocery store stood on the other side. At the end of each row of square houses stood two men armed with shotguns and wearing big silver stars pinned to their shirts.

The six cars stopped. Two bookkeepers moved from car to car. “Want to work?”

Tom answered, “Sure, but what is this?”

“That’s not your affair. Want to work?”

“Sure we do.”

“Name?”

“Joad.”

“How many men?”

“Four.”

“Women?”

“Two.”

“Kids?”

“Two.”

“Can all of you work?”

“Why—I guess so.”

“O.K. Find house sixty-three. Wages five cents a box. No bruised fruit. All right, move along now. Go to work right away.”

The cars moved on. On the door of each square red house a number was painted. “Sixty,” Tom said. “There’s sixty. Must be down that way. There, sixty-one, sixty-two—There she is.”

Al parked the truck close to the door of the little house. The family came down from the top of the truck and looked about in bewilderment. Two deputies approached. They looked closely into each face.

“Name?”

“Joad,” Tom said impatiently. “Say, what is this here?”

One of the deputies took out a long list. “Not here. Ever see these here? Look at the license. Nope. Ain’t got it. Guess they’re O.K.”

“Now you look here. We don’t want no trouble with you. Jes’ do your work and mind your own business and you’ll be all right.” The two turned abruptly and walked away. At the end of the dusty street they sat down on two boxes and their position commanded the length of the street.

Tom stared after them. “They sure do wanta make us feel at home.”

Ma opened the door of the house and stepped inside. The floor was splashed with grease. In the one room stood a rusty tin stove and nothing more. The tin stove rested on four bricks and its rusty stovepipe went up through the roof. The room smelled of sweat and grease. Rose of Sharon stood beside Ma. “We gonna live here?”

Ma was silent for a moment. “Why, sure,” she said at last. “It ain’t so bad once we wash it out. Get her mopped.”

“I like the tent better,” the girl said.

“This got a floor,” Ma suggested. “This here wouldn’ leak when it

rains." She turned to the door. "Might as well unload," she said.

The men unloaded the truck silently. A fear had fallen on them. The great square of boxes was silent. A woman went by in the street, but she did not look at them. Her head was sunk and her dirty gingham dress was frayed at the bottom in little flags.

The pall had fallen on Ruthie and Winfield. They did not dash away to inspect the place. They stayed close to the truck, close to the family. They looked forlornly up and down the dusty street. Winfield found a piece of baling wire and he bent it back and forth until it broke. He made a little crank of the shortest piece and turned it around and around in his hands.

Tom and Pa were carrying the mattresses into the house when a clerk appeared. He wore khaki trousers and a blue shirt and a black necktie. He wore silver-bound eyeglasses, and his eyes, through the thick lenses, were weak and red, and the pupils were staring little bull's eyes. He leaned forward to look at Tom.

"I want to get you checked down," he said. "How many of you going to work?"

Tom said, "They's four men. Is this here hard work?"

"Picking peaches," the clerk said. "Piece work. Give five cents a box."

"Ain't no reason why the little fellas can't help?"

"Sure not, if they're careful."

Ma stood in the doorway. "Soon's I get settled down I'll come out an' help. We got nothin' to eat, mister. Do we get paid right off ?"

"Well, no, not money right off. But you can get credit at the store for what you got coming."

"Come on, let's hurry," Tom said. "I want ta get some meat an' bread in me tonight. Where do we go, mister?"

"I'm going out there now. Come with me."

Tom and Pa and Al and Uncle John walked with him down the dusty street and into the orchard, in among the peach trees. The narrow leaves were beginning to turn a pale yellow. The peaches were little globes of gold and red on the branches. Among the trees were piles of empty boxes. The pickers scurried about, filling their buckets from the branches, putting the peaches in the boxes, carrying the boxes to the checking station; and at the stations, where the piles of filled boxes waited for the trucks, clerks waited

to check against the names of the pickers.

"Here's four more," the guide said to a clerk.

"O.K. Ever picked before?"

"Never did," said Tom.

"Well, pick careful. No bruised fruit, no windfalls. Bruise your fruit an' we won't check 'em. There's some buckets."

Tom picked up a three-gallon bucket and looked at it. "Full a holes on the bottom."

"Sure," said the near-sighted clerk. "That keeps people from stealing them. All right—down in that section. Get going."

The four Joads took their buckets and went into the orchard. "They don't waste no time," Tom said.

"Christ Awmighty," Al said. "I ruther work in a garage."

Pa had followed docilely into the field. He turned suddenly on Al. "Now you jus' quit it," he said. "You been a-hankerin' an' a-complainin' an' a-bullblowin'. You get to work. You ain't so big I can't lick you yet."

Al's face turned red with anger. He started to bluster.

Tom moved near to him. "Come on, Al," he said quietly. "Bread an' meat. We got to get 'em."

They reached for the fruit and dropped them in the buckets. Tom ran at his work. One bucket full, two buckets. He dumped them in a box. Three buckets. The box was full. "I jus' made a nickel," he called. He picked up the box and walked hurriedly to the station. "Here's a nickel's worth," he said to the checker.

The man looked into the box, turned over a peach or two. "Put it over there. That's out," he said. "I told you not to bruise them. Dumped 'em outa the bucket, didn't you? Well, every damn peach is bruised. Can't check that one. Put 'em in easy or you're working for nothing."

"Why—goddamn it——"

"Now go easy. I warned you before you started."

Tom's eyes drooped sullenly. "O.K." he said. "O.K." He went quickly back to the others. "Might's well dump what you got," he said. "Yours is the same as mine. Won't take 'em."

"Now, what the hell!" Al began.

"Got to pick easier. Can't drop 'em in the bucket. Got to lay 'em

in."

They started again, and this time they handled the fruit gently. The boxes filled more slowly. "We could figger somepin out, I bet," Tom said. "If Ruthie an' Winfiel' or Rosasharn jus' put 'em in the boxes, we could work out a system." He carried his newest box to the station. "Is this here worth a nickel?"

The checker looked them over, dug down several layers. "That's better," he said. He checked the box in. "Just take it easy."

Tom hurried back. "I got a nickel," he called. "I got a nickel. On'y got to do that there twenty times for a dollar."

They worked on steadily through the afternoon. Ruthie and Winfield found them after a while. "You got to work," Pa told them. "You got to put the peaches careful in the box. Here, now, one at a time."

The children squatted down and picked the peaches out of the extra bucket, and a line of buckets stood ready for them. Tom carried the full boxes to the station. "That's seven," he said. "That's eight. Forty cents we got. Get a nice piece of meat for forty cents."

The afternoon passed. Ruthie tried to go away. "I'm tar'd," she whined. "I got to rest."

"You got to stay right where you're at," said Pa.

Uncle John picked slowly. He filled one bucket to two of Tom's. His pace didn't change.

In mid-afternoon Ma came trudging out. "I would a come before, but Rosasharn fainted," she said. "Jes' fainted away."

"You been eatin' peaches," she said to the children. "Well, they'll blast you out." Ma's stubby body moved quickly. She abandoned her bucket quickly and picked into her apron. When the sun went down they had picked twenty boxes.

Tom set the twentieth box down. "A buck," he said. "How long do we work?"

"Work till dark, long as you can see."

"Well, can we get credit now? Ma oughta go in an' buy some stuff to eat."

"Sure. I'll give you a slip for a dollar now." He wrote on a strip of paper and handed it to Tom.

He took it to Ma. "Here you are. You can get a dollar's worth of

stuff at the store."

Ma put down her bucket and straightened her shoulders. "Gets you, the first time, don't it?"

"Sure. We'll all get used to it right off. Roll on in an' get some food."

Ma said, "What'll you like to eat?"

"Meat," said Tom. "Meat an' bread an' a big pot a coffee with sugar in. Great big piece a meat."

Ruthie wailed, "Ma, we're tar'd."

"Better come along in, then."

"They was tar'd when they started," Pa said. "Wild as rabbits they're a-gettin'. Ain't gonna be no good at all 'less we can pin 'em down."

"Soon's we get set down, they'll go to school," said Ma. She trudged away, and Ruthie and Winfield timidly followed her.

"We got to work ever' day?" Winfield asked.

Ma stopped and waited. She took his hand and walked along holding it. "It ain't hard work," she said. "Be good for you. An' you're helpin' us. If we all work, purty soon we'll live in a nice house. We all got to help."

"But I got so tar'd."

"I know. I got tar'd too. Ever'body gets wore out. Got to think about other stuff. Think about when you'll go to school."

"I don't wanta go to no school. Ruthie don't, neither. Them kids that goes to school, we seen 'em, Ma. Snots! Calls us Okies. We seen 'em. I ain't a-goin'."

Ma looked pityingly down on his straw hair. "Don' give us no trouble right now," she begged. "Soon's we get on our feet, you can be bad. But not now. We got too much, now."

"I et six of them peaches," Ruthie said.

"Well, you'll have the skitters. An' it ain't close to no toilet where we are."

The company's store was a large shed of corrugated iron. It had no display window. Ma opened the screen door and went in. A tiny man stood behind the counter. He was completely bald, and his head was blue-white. Large, brown eyebrows covered his eyes in such a high arch that his face seemed surprised and a little

frightened. His nose was long and thin, and curved like a bird's beak, and his nostrils were blocked with light brown hair. Over the sleeves of his blue shirt he wore black sateen sleeve protectors. He was leaning on his elbows on the counter when Ma entered.

"Afternoon," she said.

He inspected her with interest. The arch over his eyes became higher. "Howdy."

"I got a slip here for a dollar."

"You can get a dollar's worth," he said, and he giggled shrilly. "Yes, sir. A dollar's worth. One dollar's worth." He moved his hand at the stock. "Any of it." He pulled his sleeve protectors up neatly.

"Thought I'd get a piece of meat."

"Got all kinds," he said. "Hamburg, like to have some hamburg? Twenty cents a pound, hamburg."

"Ain't that awful high? Seems to me hamburg was fifteen las' time I got some."

"Well," he giggled softly, "yes, it's high, an' same time it ain't high. Time you go on in town for a couple poun's of hamburg, it'll cos' you 'bout a gallon gas. So you see it ain't really high here, 'cause you got no gallon a gas."

Ma said sternly, "It didn' cos' you no gallon a gas to get it out here."

He laughed delightedly. "You're lookin' at it bass-ackwards," he said. "We ain't a-buyin' it, we're a-sellin' it. If we was buyin' it, why, that'd be different."

Ma put two fingers to her mouth and frowned with thought. "It looks all full a fat an' gristle."

"I ain't guaranteein' she won't cook down," the storekeeper said. "I ain't guaranteein' I'd eat her myself; but they's lots of stuff I wouldn' do."

Ma looked up at him fiercely for a moment. She controlled her voice. "Ain't you got some cheaper kind a meat?"

"Soup bones," he said. "Ten cents a pound."

"But them's jus' bones."

"Them's jes' bones," he said. "Make nice soup. Jes' bones."

"Got any boilin' beef ?"

"Oh, yeah! Sure. That's two bits a poun'."

“Maybe I can’t get no meat,” Ma said. “But they want meat. They said they wanted meat.”

“Ever’body wants meat—needs meat. That hamburg is purty nice stuff. Use the grease that comes out a her for gravy. Purty nice. No waste. Don’t throw no bone away.”

“How—how much is side-meat?”

“Well, now you’re gettin’ into fancy stuff. Christmas stuff. Thanksgivin’ stuff. Thirty-five cents a poun’. I could sell you turkey cheaper, if I had some turkey.”

Ma sighed. “Give me two pounds hamburg.”

“Yes, ma’am.” He scooped the pale meat on a piece of waxed paper. “An’ what else?”

“Well, some bread.”

“Right here. Fine big loaf, fifteen cents.”

“That there’s a twelve-cent loaf.”

“Sure, it is. Go right in town an’ get her for twelve cents. Gallon a gas. What else can I sell you, potatoes?”

“Yes, potatoes.”

“Five pounds for a quarter.”

Ma moved menacingly toward him. “I heard enough from you. I know what they cost in town.”

The little man clamped his mouth tight. “Then go git ’em in town.”

Ma looked at her knuckles. “What is this?” she asked softly. “You own this here store?”

“No. I jus’ work here.”

“Any reason you got to make fun? That help you any?” She regarded her shiny wrinkled hands. The little man was silent. “Who owns this here store?”

“Hooper Ranches, Incorporated, ma’am.”

“An’ they set the prices?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

She looked up, smiling a little. “Ever’body comes in talks like me, is mad?”

He hesitated for a moment. “Yes, ma’am.”

“An’ that’s why you make fun?”

“What cha mean?”

“Doin’ a dirty thing like this. Shames ya, don’t it? Got to act flip, huh?” Her voice was gentle. The clerk watched her, fascinated. He didn’t answer. “That’s how it is,” Ma said finally. “Forty cents for meat, fifteen for bread, quarter for potatoes. That’s eighty cents. Coffee?”

“Twenty cents the cheapest, ma’am.”

“An’ that’s the dollar. Seven of us workin’, an’ that’s supper.” She studied her hand. “Wrap ’em up,” she said quickly.

“Yes, ma’am,” he said. “Thanks.” He put the potatoes in a bag and folded the top carefully down. His eyes slipped to Ma, and then hid in his work again. She watched him, and she smiled a little.

“How’d you get a job like this?” she asked.

“A fella got to eat,” he began; and then, belligerently, “A fella got a right to eat.”

“What fella?” Ma asked.

He placed the four packages on the counter. “Meat,” he said. “Potatoes, bread, coffee. One dollar, even.” She handed him her slip of paper and watched while he entered the name and the amount in a ledger. “There,” he said. “Now we’re all even.”

Ma picked up her bags. “Say,” she said. “We got no sugar for the coffee. My boy Tom, he wants sugar. Look!” she said. “They’re a-workin’ out there. You let me have some sugar an’ I’ll bring the slip in later.”

The little man looked away—took his eyes as far from Ma as he could. “I can’t do it,” he said softly. “That’s the rule. I can’t. I’d get in trouble. I’d get canned.”

“But they’re a-workin’ out in the field now. They got more’n a dime comin’. Gimme ten cents’ of sugar. Tom, he wanted sugar in his coffee. Spoke about it.”

“I can’t do it, ma’am. That’s the rule. No slip, no groceries. The manager, he talks about that all the time. No, I can’t do it. No, I can’t. They’d catch me. They always catch fellas. Always. I can’t.”

“For a dime?”

“For anything, ma’am.” He looked pleadingly at her. And then his face lost its fear. He took ten cents from his pocket and rang it up in the cash register. “There,” he said with relief. He pulled a little bag from under the counter, whipped it open and scooped some sugar

into it, weighed the bag, and added a little more sugar. “There you are,” he said. “Now it’s all right. You bring in your slip an’ I’ll get my dime back.”

Ma studied him. Her hand went blindly out and put the little bag of sugar on the pile in her arm. “Thanks to you,” she said quietly. She started for the door, and when she reached it, she turned about. “I’m learnin’ one thing good,” she said. “Learnin’ it all a time, ever’ day. If you’re in trouble or hurt or need—go to poor people. They’re the only ones that’ll help—the only ones.” The screen door slammed behind her.

The little man leaned his elbows on the counter and looked after her with his surprised eyes. A plump tortoise-shell cat leaped up on the counter and stalked lazily near to him. It rubbed sideways against his arms, and he reached out with his hand and pulled it against his cheek. The cat purred loudly, and the tip of its tail jerked back and forth.

Tom and Al and Pa and Uncle John walked in from the orchard when the dusk was deep. Their feet were a little heavy against the road.

“You wouldn’ think jus’ reachin’ up an’ pickin’d get you in the back,” Pa said.

“Be awright in a couple days,” said Tom. “Say, Pa, after we eat I’m a-gonna walk out an’ see what all that fuss is outside the gate. It’s been a-workin’ on me. Wanta come?”

“No,” said Pa. “I like to have a little while to jus’ work an’ not think about nothin’. Seems like I jus’ been beatin’ my brains to death for a hell of a long time. No, I’m gonna set awhile, an’ then go to bed.”

“How ’bout you, Al?”

Al looked away. “Guess I’ll look aroun’ in here, first,” he said.

“Well, I know Uncle John won’t come. Guess I’ll go her alone. Got me all curious.”

Pa said, “I’ll get a hell of a lot curiouser ’fore I’ll do anything about it—with all them cops out there.”

“Maybe they ain’t there at night,” Tom suggested.

“Well, I ain’t gonna find out. An’ you better not tell Ma where you’re a-goin’. She’ll jus’ squirt her head off worryin’.”

Tom turned to Al. “Ain’t you curious?”

“Guess I’ll jes’ look aroun’ this here camp,” Al said.

“Lookin’ for girls, huh?”

“Mindin’ my own business,” Al said acidly.

“I’m still a-goin’,” said Tom.

They emerged from the orchard into the dusty street between the red shacks. The low yellow light of kerosene lanterns shone from some of the doorways, and inside, in the half-gloom, the black shapes of people moved about. At the end of the street a guard still sat, his shotgun resting against his knee.

Tom paused as he passed the guard. “Got a place where a fella can get a bath, mister?”

The guard studied him in the half-light. At last he said, “See that water tank?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, there’s a hose over there.”

“Any warm water?”

“Say, who in hell you think you are, J. P. Morgan?”

“No,” said Tom. “No, I sure don’t. Good night, mister.”

The guard grunted contemptuously. “Hot water, for Christ’s sake. Be wantin’ tubs next.” He stared glumly after the four Joads.

A second guard came around the end house. “’S’matter, Mack?”

“Why, them goddamn Okies. ‘Is they warm water?’ he says.”

The second guard rested his gun butt on the ground. “It’s them gov’ment camps,” he said. “I bet that fella been in a gov’ment camp. We ain’t gonna have no peace till we wipe them camps out. They’ll be wantin’ clean sheets, first thing we know.”

Mack asked, “How is it out at the main gate—hear anything?”

“Well, they was out there yellin’ all day. State police got it in hand. They’re runnin’ the hell outa them smart guys. I heard they’s a long lean son-of-a-bitch spark-pluggin’ the thing. Fella says they’ll get him tonight, an’ then she’ll go to pieces.”

“We won’t have no job if it comes too easy,” Mack said.

“We’ll have a job, all right. These goddamn Okies! You got to watch ’em all the time. Things get a little quiet, we can always stir ’em up a little.”

“Have trouble when they cut the rate here, I guess.”

“We sure will. No, you needn’ worry about us havin’ work—not while Hooper’s snubbin’ close.”

The fire roared in the Joad house. Hamburger patties splashed and hissed in the grease, and the potatoes bubbled. The house was full of smoke, and the yellow lantern light threw heavy black shadows on the walls. Ma worked quickly about the fire while Rose of Sharon sat on a box resting her heavy abdomen on her knees.

“Feelin’ better now?” Ma asked.

“Smell a cookin’ gets me. I’m hungry, too.”

“Go set in the door,” Ma said. “I got to have that box to break up anyways.”

The men trooped in. “Meat, by God!” said Tom. “And coffee. I smell her. Jesus, I’m hungry! I et a lot of peaches, but they didn’ do no good. Where can we wash, Ma?”

“Go down to the water tank. Wash down there. I jus’ sent Ruthie an’ Winfiel’ to wash.” The men went out again.

“Go on now, Rosasharn,” Ma ordered. “Either you set in the door or else on the bed. I got to break that box up.”

The girl helped herself up with her hands. She moved heavily to one of the mattresses and sat down on it. Ruthie and Winfield came in quietly, trying by silence and by keeping close to the wall to remain obscure.

Ma looked over at them. “I got a feelin’ you little fellas is lucky they ain’t much light,” she said. She pounced at Winfield and felt his hair. “Well, you got wet, anyway, but I bet you ain’t clean.”

“They wasn’t no soap,” Winfield complained.

“No, that’s right. I couldn’ buy no soap. Not today. Maybe we can get soap tomorra.” She went back to the stove, laid out the plates, and began to serve the supper. Two patties apiece and a big potato. She placed three slices of bread on each plate. When the meat was all out of the frying pan she poured a little of the grease on each plate. The men came in again, their faces dripping and their hair shining with water.

“Leave me at her,” Tom cried.

They took the plates. They ate silently, wolfishly, and wiped up the grease with the bread. The children retired into the corner of the room, put their plates on the floor, and knelt in front of the food

like little animals.

Tom swallowed the last of his bread. “Got any more, Ma?”

“No,” she said. “That’s all. You made a dollar, an’ that’s a dollar’s worth.”

“That?”

“They charge extry out here. We got to go in town when we can.”

“I ain’t full,” said Tom.

“Well, tomorra you’ll get in a full day. Tomorra night—we’ll have plenty.”

Al wiped his mouth on his sleeve. “Guess I’ll take a look around,” he said.

“Wait, I’ll go with you.” Tom followed him outside. In the darkness Tom went close to his brother. “Sure you don’ wanta come with me?”

“No. I’m gonna look aroun’ like I said.”

“O.K.,” said Tom. He turned away and strolled down the street. The smoke from the houses hung low to the ground, and the lanterns threw their pictures of doorways and windows into the street. On the doorsteps people sat and looked out into the darkness. Tom could see their heads turn as their eyes followed him down the street. At the street end the dirt road continued across a stubble field, and the black lumps of haycocks were visible in the starlight. A thin blade of moon was low in the sky toward the west, and the long cloud of the milky way trailed clearly overhead. Tom’s feet sounded softly on the dusty road, a dark patch against the yellow stubble. He put his hands in his pockets and trudged along toward the main gate. An embankment came close to the road. Tom could hear the whisper of water against the grasses in the irrigation ditch. He climbed up the bank and looked down on the dark water, and saw the stretched reflections of the stars. The State road was ahead. Car lights swooping past showed where it was. Tom set out again toward it. He could see the high wire gate in the starlight.

A figure stirred beside the road. A voice said, “Hello—who is it?”

Tom stopped and stood still. “Who are you?”

A man stood up and walked near. Tom could see the gun in his hand. Then a flashlight played on his face. “Where you think you’re going?”

“Well, I thought I’d take a walk. Any law against it?”

"You better walk some other way."

Tom asked, "Can't I even get out of here?"

"Not tonight you can't. Want to walk back, or shall I whistle some help an' take you?"

"Hell," said Tom, "it ain't nothin' to me. If it's gonna cause a mess, I don't give a darn. Sure, I'll go back."

The dark figure relaxed. The flash went off. "Ya see, it's for your own good. Them crazy pickets might get you."

"What pickets?"

"Them goddamn reds."

"Oh," said Tom. "I didn' know 'bout them."

"You seen 'em when you come, didn' you?"

"Well, I seen a bunch a guys, but they was so many cops I didn' know. Thought it was a accident."

"Well, you better git along back."

"That's O.K. with me, mister." He swung about and started back. He walked quietly along the road a hundred yards, and then he stopped and listened. The twittering call of a raccoon sounded near the irrigation ditch and, very far away, the angry howl of a tied dog. Tom sat down beside the road and listened. He heard the high soft laughter of a night hawk and the stealthy movement of a creeping animal in the stubble. He inspected the skyline in both directions, dark frames both ways, nothing to show against. Now he stood up and walked slowly to the right of the road, off into the stubble field, and he walked bent down, nearly as low as the haycocks. He moved slowly and stopped occasionally to listen. At last he came to the wire fence, five strands of taut barbed wire. Beside the fence he lay on his back, moved his head under the lowest strand, held the wire up with his hands and slid himself under, pushing against the ground with his feet.

He was about to get up when a group of men walked by on the edge of the highway. Tom waited until they were far ahead before he stood up and followed them. He watched the side of the road for tents. A few automobiles went by. A stream cut across the fields, and the highway crossed it on a small concrete bridge. Tom looked over the side of the bridge. In the bottom of the deep ravine he saw a tent and a lantern was burning inside. He watched it for a moment, saw the shadows of people against the canvas walls. Tom

climbed a fence and moved down into the ravine through brush and dwarf willows; and in the bottom, beside a tiny stream, he found a trail. A man sat on a box in front of the tent.

"Evenin'," Tom said.

"Who are you?"

"Well—I guess, well—I'm jus' goin' past."

"Know anybody here?"

"No. I tell you I was jus' goin' past."

A head stuck out of the tent. A voice said, "What's the matter?"

"Casy!" Tom cried. "Casy! For Chris' sake, what you doin' here?"

"Why, my God, it's Tom Joad! Come on in, Tommy. Come on in."

"Know him, do ya?" the man in front asked.

"Know him? Christ, yes. Knowed him for years. I come west with him. Come on in, Tom." He clutched Tom's elbow and pulled him into the tent.

Three other men sat on the ground, and in the center of the tent a lantern burned. The men looked up suspiciously. A dark-faced, scowling man held out his hand. "Glad to meet ya," he said. "I heard what Casy said. This the fella you was tellin' about?"

"Sure. This is him. Well, for God's sake! Where's your folks? What you doin' here?"

"Well," said Tom, "we heard they was work this-a-way. An' we come, an' a bunch a State cops run us into this here ranch an' we been a-pickin' peaches all afternoon. I seen a bunch a fellas yellin'. They wouldn' tell me nothin', so I come out here to see what's goin' on. How'n hell'd you get here, Casy?"

The preacher leaned forward and the yellow lantern light fell on his high pale forehead. "Jail house is a kinda funny place," he said. "Here's me, been a-goin' into the wilderness like Jesus to try find out somepin. Almost got her sometimes, too. But it's in the jail house I really got her." His eyes were sharp and merry. "Great big ol' cell, an' she's full all a time. New guys come in, and guys go out. An' 'course I talked to all of 'em."

"'Course you did," said Tom. "Always talk. If you was up on the gallows you'd be passin' the time a day with the hangman. Never seen sech a talker."

The men in the tent chuckled. A wizened little man with a

wrinkled face slapped his knee. “Talks all the time,” he said. “Folks kinda likes to hear ’im, though.”

“Use’ ta be a preacher,” said Tom. “Did he tell that?”

“Sure, he told.”

Casy grinned. “Well, sir,” he went on, “I begin gettin’ at things. Some a them fellas in the tank was drunks, but mostly they was there ’cause they stole stuff; an’ mostly it was stuff they needed an’ couldn’ get no other way. Ya see?” he asked.

“No,” said Tom.

“Well, they was nice fellas, ya see. What made ’em bad was they needed stuff. An’ I begin to see, then. It’s need that makes all the trouble. I ain’t got it worked out. Well, one day they give us some beans that was sour. One fella started yellin’, an’ nothin’ happened. He yelled his head off. Trusty come along an’ looked in an’ went on. Then another fella yelled. Well, sir, then we all got yellin’. And we all got on the same tone, an’ I tell ya, it jus’ seemed like that tank bulged an’ give and swelled up. By God! Then somepin happened! They come a-runnin’, and they give us some other stuff to eat—give it to us. Ya see?”

“No,” said Tom.

Casy put his chin down on his hands. “Maybe I can’t tell you,” he said. “Maybe you got to find out. Where’s your cap?”

“I come out without it.”

“How’s your sister?”

“Hell, she’s big as a cow. I bet she got twins. Gonna need wheels under her stomach. Got to holdin’ it with her han’s, now. You ain’ tol’ me what’s goin’ on.”

The wizened man said, “We struck. This here’s a strike.”

“Well, fi’ cents a box ain’t much, but a fella can eat.”

“Fi’ cents?” the wizened man cried. “Fi’ cents! They payin’ you fi’ cents?”

“Sure. We made a buck an’ a half.”

A heavy silence fell in the tent. Casy stared out the entrance, into the dark night. “Lookie, Tom,” he said at last. “We come to work there. They says it’s gonna be fi’ cents. There was a hell of a lot of us. We got there an’ they says they’re payin’ two an’ a half cents. A fella can’t even eat on that, an’ if he got kids—So we says we won’t

take it. So they druv us off. An' all the cops in the worl' come down on us. Now they're payin' you five. When they bust this here strike —ya think they'll pay five?"

"I dunno," Tom said. "Payin' five now."

"Lookie," said Casy. "We tried to camp together, an' they druv us like pigs. Scattered us. Beat the hell outa fellas. Druv us like pigs. They run you in like pigs, too. We can't las' much longer. Some people ain't et for two days. You goin' back tonight?"

"Aim to," said Tom.

"Well—tell the folks in there how it is, Tom. Tell 'em they're starvin' us an' stabbin' theirself in the back. 'Cause sure as cowflops she'll drop to two an' a half jus' as soon as they clear us out."

"I'll tell 'em," said Tom. "I don' know how. Never seen so many guys with guns. Don' know if they'll even let a fella talk. An' folks don' pass no time of day. They jus' hang down their heads an' won't even give a fella a howdy."

"Try an' tell 'em, Tom. They'll get two an' a half, jus' the minute we're gone. You know what two an' a half is—that's one ton of peaches picked an' carried for a dollar." He dropped his head. "No —you can't do it. You can't get your food for that. Can't eat for that."

"I'll try to get to tell the folks."

"How's your ma?"

"Purty good. She liked that gov'ment camp. Baths an' hot water."

"Yeah—I heard."

"It was pretty nice there. Couldn'find no work, though. Had a leave."

"I'd like to go to one," said Casy. "Like to see it. Fella says they ain't no cops."

"Folks is their own cops."

Casy looked up excitedly. "An' was they any trouble? Fightin', stealin', drinkin'?"

"No," said Tom.

"Well, if a fella went bad—what then? What'd they do?"

"Put 'im outa the camp."

"But they wasn' many?"

"Hell, no," said Tom. "We was there a month, an' on'y one."

Casy's eyes shone with excitement. He turned to the other men. "Ya see?" he cried. "I tol' you. Cops cause more trouble than they stop. Look, Tom. Try an' get the folks in there to come on out. They can do it in a couple days. Them peaches is ripe. Tell 'em."

"They won't," said Tom. "They're a-gettin' five, an' they don' give a damn about nothin' else."

"But jus' the minute they ain't strikebreakin' they won't get no five."

"I don' think they'll swalla that. Five they're a-gettin'. Tha's all they care about."

"Well, tell 'em anyways."

"Pa wouldn' do it," Tom said. "I know 'im. He'd say it wasn't none of his business."

"Yes," Casy said disconsolately. "I guess that's right. Have to take a beatin' 'fore he'll know."

"We was outa food," Tom said. "Tonight we had meat. Not much, but we had it. Think Pa's gonna give up his meat on account a other fellas? An' Rosasharn oughta get milk. Think Ma's gonna wanta starve that baby jus' 'cause a bunch a fellas is yellin' outside a gate?"

Casy said sadly, "I wisht they could see it. I wisht they could see the on'y way they can depen' on their meat—Oh, the hell! Get tar'd sometimes. God-awful tar'd. I knowed a fella. Brang 'im in while I was in the jail house. Been tryin' to start a union. Got one started. An' then them vigilantes bust it up. An' know what? Them very folks he been tryin' to help tossed him out. Wouldn' have nothin' to do with 'im. Scared they'd get saw in his comp'ny. Says, 'Git out. You're a danger on us.' Well, sir, it hurt his feelin's purty bad. But then he says, 'It ain't so bad if you know.' He says, 'French Revolution—all them fellas that figgered her out got their heads chopped off. Always that way,' he says. 'Jus' as natural as rain. You didn' do it for fun no way. Doin' it 'cause you have to. 'Cause it's you. Look a Washington,' he says. 'Fit the Revolution, an' after, them sons-a-bitches turned on him. An' Lincoln the same. Same folks yellin' to kill 'em. Natural as rain.'"

"Don't soun' like no fun," said Tom.

"No, it don't. This fella in jail, he says, 'Anyways, you do what you can. An',' he says, 'the on'y thing you got to look at is that ever'

time they's a little step fo'ward, she may slip back a little, but she never slips clear back. You can prove that,' he says, 'an' that makes the whole thing right. An' that means they wasn't no waste even if it seemed like they was.'"

"Talkin'," said Tom. "Always talkin'. Take my brother Al. He's out lookin' for a girl. He don't care 'bout nothin' else. Couple days he'll get him a girl. Think about it all day an' do it all night. He don't give a damn 'bout steps up or down or sideways."

"Sure," said Casy. "Sure. He's jus' doin' what he's got to do. All of us like that."

The man seated outside pulled the tent flap wide. "Goddamn it, I don' like it," he said.

Casy looked out at him. "What's the matter?"

"I don' know. I jus' itch all over. Nervous as a cat."

"Well, what's the matter?"

"I don' know. Seems like I hear somepin, an' then I listen an' they ain't nothin' to hear."

"You're jus' jumpy," the wizened man said. He got up and went outside. And in a second he looked into the tent. "They's a great big ol' black cloud a-sailin' over. Bet she's got thunder. That's what's itchin' him —'lectricity." He ducked out again. The other two men stood up from the ground and went outside.

Casy said softly, "All of 'em's itchy. Them cops been sayin' how they're gonna beat the hell outa us an' run us outa the county. They figger I'm a leader 'cause I talk so much."

The wizened face looked in again. "Casy, turn out that lantern an' come outside. They's somepin."

Casy turned the screw. The flame drew down into the slots and popped and went out. Casy groped outside and Tom followed him. "What is it?" Casy asked softly.

"I dunno. Listen!"

There was a wall of frog sounds that merged with silence. A high, shrill whistle of crickets. But through this background came other sounds—faint footsteps from the road, a crunch of clods up on the bank, a little swish of brush down the stream.

"Can't really tell if you hear it. Fools you. Get nervous," Casy reassured them. "We're all nervous. Can't really tell. You hear it, Tom?"

“I hear it,” said Tom. “Yeah, I hear it. I think they’s guys comin’ from ever’ which way. We better get outa here.”

The wizened man whispered, “Under the bridge span—out that way. Hate to leave my tent.”

“Le’s go,” said Casy.

They moved quietly along the edge of the stream. The black span was a cave before them. Casy bent over and moved through. Tom behind. Their feet slipped into the water. Thirty feet they moved, and their breathing echoed from the curved ceiling. Then they came out on the other side and straightened up.

A sharp call, “There they are!” Two flashlight beams fell on the men, caught them, blinded them. “Stand where you are.” The voices came out of the darkness. “That’s him. That shiny bastard. That’s him.”

Casy stared blindly at the light. He breathed heavily. “Listen,” he said. “You fellas don’ know what you’re doin’. You’re helpin’ to starve kids.”

“Shut up, you red son-of-a-bitch.”

A short heavy man stepped into the light. He carried a new white pick handle.

Casy went on, “You don’ know what you’re a-doin’.”

The heavy man swung with the pick handle. Casy dodged down into the swing. The heavy club crashed into the side of his head with a dull crunch of bone, and Casy fell sideways out of the light.

“Jesus, George. I think you killed him.”

“Put the light on him,” said George. “Serve the son-of-a-bitch right.” The flashlight beam dropped, searched and found Casy’s crushed head.

Tom looked down at the preacher. The light crossed the heavy man’s legs and the white new pick handle. Tom leaped silently. He wrenched the club free. The first time he knew he had missed and struck a shoulder, but the second time his crushing blow found the head, and as the heavy man sank down, three more blows found his head. The lights danced about. There were shouts, the sound of running feet, crashing through brush. Tom stood over the prostrate man. And then a club reached his head, a glancing blow. He felt the stroke like an electric shock. And then he was running along the stream, bending low. He heard the splash of footsteps following

him. Suddenly he turned and squirmed up into the brush, deep into a poison-oak thicket. And he lay still. The footsteps came near, the light beams glanced along the stream bottom. Tom wriggled up through the thicket to the top. He emerged in an orchard. And still he could hear the calls, the pursuit in the stream bottom. He bent low and ran over the cultivated earth; the clods slipped and rolled under his feet. Ahead he saw the bushes that bounded the field, bushes along the edges of an irrigation ditch. He slipped through the fence, edged in among vines and blackberry bushes. And then he lay still, panting hoarsely. He felt his numb face and nose. The nose was crushed, and a trickle of blood dripped from his chin. He lay still on his stomach until his mind came back. And then he crawled slowly over the edge of the ditch. He bathed his face in the cool water, tore off the tail of his blue shirt and dipped it and held it against his torn cheek and nose. The water stung and burned.

The black cloud had crossed the sky, a blob of dark against the stars. The night was quiet again.

Tom stepped into the water and felt the bottom drop from under his feet. He threshed the two strokes across the ditch and pulled himself heavily up the other bank. His clothes clung to him. He moved and made a slopping noise; his shoes squished. Then he sat down, took off his shoes and emptied them. He wrung the bottoms of his trousers, took off his coat and squeezed the water from it.

Along the highway he saw the dancing beams of the flashlights, searching the ditches. Tom put on his shoes and moved cautiously across the stubble field. The squishing noise no longer came from his shoes. He went by instinct toward the other side of the stubble field, and at last he came to the road. Very cautiously he approached the square of houses.

Once a guard, thinking he heard a noise, called, “Who’s there?”

Tom dropped and froze to the ground, and the flashlight beam passed over him. He crept silently to the door of the Joad house. The door squalled on its hinges. And Ma’s voice, calm and steady and wide awake:

“What’s that?”

“Me. Tom.”

“Well, you better get some sleep. Al ain’t in yet.”

“He must a foun’ a girl.”

“Go on to sleep,” she said softly. “Over under the window.”

He found his place and took off his clothes to the skin. He lay shivering under his blanket. And his torn face awakened from its numbness, and his whole head throbbed.

It was an hour more before Al came in. He moved cautiously near and stepped on Tom’s wet clothes.

“Sh!” said Tom.

Al whispered, “You awake? How’d you get wet?”

“Sh,” said Tom. “Tell you in the mornin’.”

Pa turned on his back, and his snoring filled the room with gasps and snorts.

“You’re col’,” Al said.

“Sh. Go to sleep.” The little square of the window showed gray against the black of the room.

Tom did not sleep. The nerves of his wounded face came back to life and throbbed, and his cheek bone ached, and his broken nose bulged and pulsed with pain that seemed to toss him about, to shake him. He watched the little square window, saw the stars slide down over it and drop from sight. At intervals he heard the footsteps of the watchmen.

At last the roosters crowed, far away, and gradually the window lightened. Tom touched his swollen face with his fingertips, and at his movement Al groaned and murmured in his sleep.

The dawn came finally. In the houses, packed together, there was a sound of movement, a crash of breaking sticks, a little clatter of pans. In the graying gloom Ma sat up suddenly. Tom could see her face, swollen with sleep. She looked at the window, for a long moment. And then she threw the blanket off and found her dress. Still sitting down, she put it over her head and held her arms up and let the dress slide down to her waist. She stood up and pulled the dress down around her ankles. Then, in bare feet, she stepped carefully to the window and looked out, and while she stared at the growing light, her quick fingers unbraided her hair and smoothed the strands and braided them up again. Then she clasped her hands in front of her and stood motionless for a moment. Her face was lighted sharply by the window. She turned, stepped carefully among the mattresses, and found the lantern. The shade screeched up, and she lighted the wick.

Pa rolled over and blinked at her. She said, “Pa, you got more money?”

“Huh? Yeah. Paper wrote for sixty cents.”

“Well, git up an’ go buy some flour an’ lard. Quick, now.”

Pa yawned. “Maybe the store ain’t open.”

“Make ’em open it. Got to get somepin in you fellas. You got to get out to work.”

Pa struggled into his overalls and put on his rusty coat. He went sluggishly out the door, yawning and stretching.

The children awakened and watched from under their blanket, like mice. Pale light filled the room now, but colorless light, before the sun. Ma glanced at the mattresses. Uncle John was awake, Al slept heavily. Her eyes moved to Tom. For a moment she peered at him, and then she moved quickly to him. His face was puffed and blue, and the blood was dried black on his lips and chin. The edges of the torn cheek were gathered and tight.

“Tom,” she whispered, “what’s the matter?”

“Sh!” he said. “Don’t talk loud. I got in a fight.”

“Tom!”

“I couldn’ help it, Ma.”

She knelt down beside him. “You in trouble?”

He was a long time answering. “Yeah,” he said. “In trouble. I can’t go out to work. I got to hide.”

The children crawled near on their hands and knees, staring greedily. “What’s the matter’th him, Ma?”

“Hush!” Ma said. “Go wash up.”

“We got no soap.”

“Well, use water.”

“What’s the matter’th Tom?”

“Now you hush. An’ don’t you tell nobody.”

They backed away and squatted down against the far wall, knowing they would not be inspected.

Ma asked, “Is it bad?”

“Nose busted.”

“I mean the trouble?”

“Yeah. Bad!”

Al opened his eyes and looked at Tom. “Well, for Chris’ sake! What was you in?”

“What’s a matter?” Uncle John asked.

Pa clumped in. “They was open all right.” He put a tiny bag of flour and his package of lard on the floor beside the stove. “’S’a matter?” he asked.

Tom braced himself on one elbow for a moment, and then he lay back. “Jesus, I’m weak. I’m gonna tell ya once. So I’ll tell all of ya. How ’bout the kids?”

Ma looked at them, huddled against the wall. “Go wash ya face.”

“No,” Tom said. “They got to hear. They got to know. They might blab if they don’ know.”

“What the hell is this?” Pa demanded.

“I’m a-gonna tell. Las’ night I went out to see what all the yellin’ was about. An’ I come on Casy.”

“The preacher?”

“Yeah, Pa. The preacher, on’y he was a-leadin’ the strike. They come for him.”

Pa demanded, “Who come for him?”

“I dunno. Same kinda guys that turned us back on the road that night. Had pick handles.” He paused. “They killed ’im. Busted his head. I was standin’ there. I went nuts. Grabbed the pick handle.” He looked bleakly back at the night, the darkness, the flashlights, as he spoke. “I—I clubbed a guy.”

Ma’s breath caught in her throat. Pa stiffened. “Kill ’im?” he asked softly.

“I—don’t know. I was nuts. Tried to.”

Ma asked, “Was you saw?”

“I dunno. I dunno. I guess so. They had the lights on us.”

For a moment Ma stared into his eyes. “Pa,” she said, “break up some boxes. We got to get breakfas’. You got to go to work. Ruthie, Winfiel’. If anybody asts you—Tom is sick—you hear? If you tell—he’ll—get sent to jail. You hear?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Keep your eye on ’em, John. Don’ let ’em talk to nobody.” She built the fire as Pa broke the boxes that had held the goods. She made her dough, put a pot of coffee to boil. The light wood caught

and roared its flame in the chimney.

Pa finished breaking the boxes. He came near to Tom. “Casy—he was a good man. What’d he wanta mess with that stuff for?”

Tom said dully, “They come to work for fi’ cents a box.”

“That’s what we’re a-gettin’.”

“Yeah. What we was a-doin’ was breakin’ strike. They give them fellas two an’ a half cents.”

“You can’t eat on that.”

“I know,” Tom said wearily. “That’s why they struck. Well, I think they bust that strike las’ night. We’ll maybe be gettin’ two an’ a half cents today.”

“Why, the sons-a-bitches——”

“Yeah! Pa. You see? Casy was still a—good man. Goddamn it, I can’t get that pitcher outa my head. Him layin’ there—head jus’ crushed flat an’ oozin’. Jesus!” He covered his eyes with his hand.

“Well, what we gonna do?” Uncle John asked.

Al was standing up now. “Well, by God, I know what I’m gonna do. I’m gonna get out of it.”

“No, you ain’t, Al,” Tom said. “We need you now. I’m the one. I’ma danger now. Soon’s I get on my feet I got to go.”

Ma worked at the stove. Her head was half turned to hear. She put grease in the frying pan, and when it whispered with heat, she spooned the dough into it.

Tom went on, “You got to stay, Al. You got to take care a the truck.”

“Well, I don’ like it.”

“Can’t help it, Al. It’s your folks. You can help ’em. I’m a danger to ’em.”

Al grumbled angrily. “I don’ know why I ain’t let to get me a job in a garage.”

“Later, maybe.” Tom looked past him, and he saw Rose of Sharon lying on the mattress. Her eyes were huge—opened wide. “Don’t worry,” he called to her. “Don’t you worry. Gonna get you some milk today.” She blinked slowly, and didn’t answer him.

Pa said, “We got to know, Tom. Think ya killed this fella?”

“I don’ know. It was dark. An’ somebody smacked me. I don’ know. I hope so. I hope I killed the bastard.”

“Tom!” Ma called. “Don’ talk like that.”

From the street came the sound of many cars moving slowly. Pa stepped to the window and looked out. “They’s a whole slew a new people comin’ in,” he said.

“I guess they bust the strike, awright,” said Tom. “I guess you’ll start at two an’ a half cents.”

“But a fella could work at a run, an’ still he couldn’ eat.”

“I know,” said Tom. “Eat win’fall peaches. That’ll keep ya up.”

Ma turned the dough and stirred the coffee. “Listen to me,” she said. “I’m gettin’ cornmeal today. We’re a-gonna eat cornmeal mush. An’ soon’s we get enough for gas, we’re movin’ away. This ain’t a good place. An’ I ain’t gonna have Tom out alone. No, sir.”

“Ya can’t do that, Ma. I tell you I’m jus’ a danger to ya.”

Her chin was set. “That’s what we’ll do. Here, come eat this here, an’ then get out to work. I’ll come out soon’s I get washed up. We got to make some money.”

They ate the fried dough so hot that it sizzled in their mouths. And they tossed the coffee down and filled their cups and drank more coffee.

Uncle John shook his head over his plate. “Don’t look like we’re a-gonna get shet of this here. I bet it’s my sin.”

“Oh, shut up!” Pa cried. “We ain’t got the time for your sin now. Come on now. Le’s get out to her. Kids, you come he’p. Ma’s right. We got to go outa here.”

When they were gone, Ma took a plate and a cup to Tom. “Better eat a little somepin.”

“I can’t, Ma. I’m so darn sore I couldn’ chew.”

“You better try.”

“No, I can’t, Ma.”

She sat down on the edge of his mattress. “You got to tell me,” she said. “I got to figger how it was. I got to keep straight. What was Casy a-doin’? Why’d they kill ’im?”

“He was jus’ standin’ there with the lights on’ ’im.”

“What’d he say? Can ya ’member what he says?”

Tom said, “Sure. Casy said, ‘You got no right to starve people.’ An’ then this heavy fella called him a red son-of-a-bitch. An’ Casy says, ‘You don’ know what you’re a-doin’.’ An’ then this guy

smashed 'im."

Ma looked down. She twisted her hands together. "Tha's what he said—'You don' know what you're doin' '?"

"Yeah!"

Ma said, "I wisht Granma could a heard."

"Ma—I didn' know what I was a-doin', no more'n when you take a breath. I didn' even know I was gonna do it."

"It's awright. I wisht you didn' do it. I wisht you wasn' there. But you done what you had to do. I can't read no fault on you." She went to the stove and dipped a cloth in the heating dishwater. "Here," she said. "Put that there on your face."

He laid the warm cloth over his nose and cheek, and winced at the heat. "Ma, I'm a-gonna go away tonight. I can't go puttin' this on you folks."

Ma said angrily, "Tom! They's a whole lot I don' un'erstan'. But goin' away ain't gonna ease us. It's gonna bear us down." And she went on, "They was the time when we was on the lan'. They was a boundary to us then. Ol' folks died off, an' little fellas come, an' we was always one thing—we was the fambly—kinda whole and clear. An' now we ain't clear no more. I can't get straight. They ain't nothin' keeps us clear. Al—he's a-hankerin' an' a-jibbitin' to go off on his own. An' Uncle John is jus' a-draggin' along. Pa's lost his place. He ain't the head no more. We're crackin' up, Tom. There ain't no fambly now. An' Rosasharn—" She looked around and found the girl's wide eyes. "She gonna have her baby an' they won't be no fambly. I don' know. I been a-tryin' to keep her goin'. Winfiel'—what's he gonna be, this-a-way? Gettin' wild, an' Ruthie too—like animals. Got nothin' to trus'. Don' go, Tom. Stay an' help."

"O.K.," he said tiredly. "O.K. I shouldn', though. I know it."

Ma went to her dishpan and washed the tin plates and dried them. "You didn' sleep."

"No."

"Well, you sleep. I seen your clothes was wet. I'll hang 'em by the stove to dry." She finished her work. "I'm goin' now. I'll pick. Rosasharn, if anybody comes, Tom's sick, you hear? Don' let nobody in. You hear?" Rose of Sharon nodded. "We'll come back at noon. Get some sleep, Tom. Maybe we can get outa here tonight."

She moved swiftly to him. “Tom, you ain’t gonna slip out?”

“No, Ma.”

“You sure? You won’t go?”

“No, Ma. I’ll be here.”

“Awright. ’Member, Rosasharn.” She went out and closed the door firmly behind her.

Tom lay still—and then a wave of sleep lifted him to the edge of unconsciousness and dropped him slowly back and lifted him again.

“You—Tom!”

“Huh? Yeah!” He started awake. He looked over at Rose of Sharon. Her eyes were blazing with resentment. “What you want?”

“You killed a fella!”

“Yeah. Not so loud! You wanta rouse somebody?”

“What da I care?” she cried. “That lady tol’ me. She says what sin’s gonna do. She tol’ me. What chance I got to have a nice baby? Connie’s gone, an’ I ain’t gettin’ good food. I ain’t gettin’ milk.” Her voice rose hysterically. “An’ now you kill a fella. What chance that baby got to get bore right? I know—gonna be a freak—a freak! I never done no dancin’.”

Tom got up. “Sh!” he said. “You’re gonna get folks in here.”

“I don’ care. I’ll have a freak! I didn’ dance no hug-dance.”

He went near to her. “Be quiet.”

“You get away from me. It ain’t the first fella you killed, neither.” Her face was growing red with hysteria. Her words blurred. “I don’ wanta look at you.” She covered her head with her blanket.

Tom heard the choked, smothered cries. He bit his lower lip and studied the floor. And then he went to Pa’s bed. Under the edge of the mattress the rifle lay, a lever-action Winchester .38, long and heavy. Tom picked it up and dropped the lever to see that a cartridge was in the chamber. He tested the hammer on half-cock. And then he went back to his mattress. He laid the rifle on the floor beside him, stock up and barrel pointing down. Rose of Sharon’s voice thinned to a whimper. Tom lay down again and covered himself, covered his bruised cheek with the blanket and made a little tunnel to breathe through. He sighed, “Jesus, oh, Jesus!”

Outside, a group of cars went by, and voices sounded.

“How many men?”

"Jes' us—three. Whatcha payin'?"

"You go to house twenty-five. Number's right on the door."

"O.K., mister. Whatcha payin'?"

"Two and a half cents."

"Why, goddamn it, a man can't make his dinner!"

"That's what we're payin'. There's two hundred men coming from the South that'll be glad to get it."

"But, Jesus, mister!"

"Go on now. Either take it or go on along. I got no time to argue."

"But——"

"Look. I didn' set the price. I'm just checking you in. If you want it, take it. If you don't, turn right around and go along."

"Twenty-five, you say?"

"Yes, twenty-five."

Tom dozed on his mattress. A stealthy sound in the room awakened him. His hand crept to the rifle and tightened on the grip. He drew back the covers from his face. Rose of Sharon was standing beside his mattress.

"What you want?" Tom demanded.

"You sleep," she said. "You jus' sleep off. I'll watch the door. They won't nobody get in."

He studied her face for a moment. "O.K.," he said, and he covered his face with the blanket again.

In the beginning dusk Ma came back to the house. She paused on the doorstep and knocked and said, "It's me," so that Tom would not be worried. She opened the door and entered, carrying a bag. Tom awakened and sat up on his mattress. His wound had dried and tightened so that the unbroken skin was shiny. His left eye was drawn nearly shut. "Anybody come while we was gone?" Ma asked.

"No," he said. "Nobody. I see they dropped the price."

"How'd you know?"

"I heard folks talkin' outside."

Rose of Sharon looked dully up at Ma.

Tom pointed at her with his thumb. "She raised hell, Ma. Thinks

all the trouble is aimed right smack at her. If I'm gonna get her upset like that I oughta go 'long."

Ma turned on Rose of Sharon. "What you doin'?"

The girl said resentfully, "How'm I gonna have a nice baby with stuff like this?"

Ma said, "Hush! You hush now. I know how you're a-feelin', an' I know you can't he'p it, but you jus' keep your mouth shut."

She turned back to Tom. "Don't pay her no mind, Tom. It's awful hard, an' I 'member how it is. Ever'thing is a-shootin' right at you when you're gonna have a baby, an' ever'thing anybody says is a insult, an' ever'thing's against you. Don't pay no mind. She can't he'p it. It's jus' the way she feels."

"I don' wanta hurt her."

"Hush! Jus' don' talk." She set her bag down on the cold stove. "Didn' hardly make nothin'," she said. "I tol' you, we're gonna get outa here. Tom, try an' wrassle me some wood. No—you can't. Here, we got on'y this one box lef'. Break it up. I tol' the other fellas to pick up some sticks on the way back. Gonna have mush an' a little sugar on."

Tom got up and stamped the last box to small pieces. Ma carefully built her fire in one end of the stove, conserving the flame under one stove hole. She filled a kettle with water and put it over the flame. The kettle rattled over the direct fire, rattled and wheezed.

"How was it pickin' today?" Tom asked.

Ma dipped a cup into her bag of cornmeal. "I don' wanta talk about it. I was thinkin' today how they use' to be jokes. I don' like it, Tom. We don't joke no more. When they's a joke, it's a mean bitter joke, an' they ain't no fun in it. Fella says today, 'Depression is over. I seen a jackrabbit, an' they wasn't nobody after him.' An' another fella says, 'That ain't the reason. Can't afford to kill jackrabbits no more. Catch 'em and milk 'em an' turn 'em loose. One you seen prob'ly gone dry.' That's how I mean. Ain't really funny, not funny like that time Uncle John converted an Injun an' brang him home, an' that Injun et his way clean to the bottom of the bean bin, an' then backslid with Uncle John's whisky. Tom, put a rag with col' water on your face."

The dusk deepened. Ma lighted the lantern and hung it on a nail.

She fed the fire and poured cornmeal gradually into the hot water. “Rosasharn.” she said, “can you stir the mush?”

Outside there was a patter of running feet. The door burst open and banged against the wall. Ruthie rushed in. “Ma!” she cried. “Ma. Winfiel’ got a fit!”

“Where? Tell me!”

Ruthie panted, “Got white an’ fell down. Et so many peaches he skittered hisself all day. Jus’ fell down. White!”

“Take me!” Ma demanded. “Rosasharn, you watch that mush.”

She went out with Ruthie. She ran heavily up the street behind the little girl. Three men walked toward her in the dusk, and the center man carried Winfield in his arms. Ma ran up to them. “He’s mine,” she cried. “Give ’im to me.”

“I’ll carry ’im for you, ma’am.”

“No, here, give ’im to me.” She hoisted the little boy and turned back; and then she remembered herself. “I sure thank ya,” she said to the men.

“Welcome, ma’am. The little fella’s purty weak. Looks like he got worms.”

Ma hurried back, and Winfield was limp and relaxed in her arms. Ma carried him into the house and knelt down and laid him on a mattress. “Tell me. What’s the matter?” she demanded. He opened his eyes dizzily and shook his head and closed his eyes again.

Ruthie said, “I tol’ ya, Ma. He skittered all day. Ever’ little while. Et too many peaches.”

Ma felt his head. “He ain’t fevered. But he’s white and drawed out.”

Tom came near and held the lantern down. “I know,” he said. “He’s hungered. Got no strength. Get him a can a milk an’ make him drink it. Make ’im take milk on his mush.”

“Winfiel’,” Ma said. “Tell how ya feel.”

“Dizzy,” said Winfield, “jus’ a-whirlin’ dizzy.”

“You never seen sech skitters,” Ruthie said importantly.

Pa and Uncle John and Al came into the house. Their arms were full of sticks and bits of brush. They dropped their loads by the stove. “Now what?” Pa demanded.

“It’s Winfiel’. He needs some milk.”

“Christ Awmighty! We all need stuff!”

Ma said, “How much’d we make today?”

“Dollar forty-two.”

“Well, you go right over’n get a can a milk for Winfiel’.”

“Now why’d he have to get sick?”

“I don’t know why, but he is. Now you git!” Pa went grumbling out the door. “You stirrin’ that mush?”

“Yeah.” Rose of Sharon speeded up the stirring to prove it.

Al complained, “God Awmighty, Ma! Is mush all we get after workin’ till dark?”

“Al, you know we got to git. Take all we got for gas. You know.”

“But, God Awmighty, Ma! A fella needs meat if he’s gonna work.”

“Jus’ you sit quiet,” she said. “We got to take the bigges’ thing an’ whup it fust. An’ you know what that thing is.”

Tom asked, “Is it about me?”

“We’ll talk when we’ve et,” said Ma. “Al, we got enough gas to go a ways, ain’t we?”

“’Bout a quarter tank,” said Al.

“I wisht you’d tell me,” Tom said.

“After. Jus’ wait.”

“Keep a-stirrin’ that mush, you. Here, lemme put on some coffee. You can have sugar on your mush or in your coffee. They ain’t enough for both.”

Pa came back with one tall can of milk. “’Leven cents,” he said disgustedly.

“Here!” Ma took the can and stabbed it open. She let the thick stream out into a cup, and handed it to Tom. “Give that to Winfiel’.”

Tom knelt beside the mattress. “Here, drink this.”

“I can’t. I’d sick it all up. Leave me be.”

Tom stood up. “He can’t take it now, Ma. Wait a little.”

Ma took the cup and set it on the window ledge. “Don’t none of you touch that,” she warned. “That’s for Winfiel’.”

“I ain’t had no milk,” Rose of Sharon said sullenly. “I oughta have some.”

“I know, but you’re still on your feet. This here little fella’s down.

Is that mush good an' thick?"

"Yeah. Can't hardly stir it no more."

"Awright, le's eat. Now here's the sugar. They's about one spoon each. Have it on ya mush or in ya coffee."

Tom said, "I kinda like salt an' pepper on mush."

"Salt her if you like," Ma said. "The pepper's out."

The boxes were all gone. The family sat on the mattresses to eat their mush. They served themselves again and again, until the pot was nearly empty. "Save some for Winfiel'," Ma said.

Winfield sat up and drank his milk, and instantly he was ravenous. He put the mush pot between his legs and ate what was left and scraped at the crust on the sides. Ma poured the rest of the canned milk in a cup and sneaked it to Rose of Sharon to drink secretly in a corner. She poured the hot black coffee into the cups and passed them around.

"Now will you tell what's goin' on?" Tom asked. "I wanta hear."

Pa said uneasily, "I wisht Ruthie an' Winfiel' didn' hafta hear. Can't they go outside?"

Ma said, "No. They got to act growed up, even if they ain't. They's no help for it. Ruthie—you an' Winfiel' ain't ever to say what you hear, else you'll jus' break us to pieces."

"We won't," Ruthie said. "We're growed up."

"Well, jus' be quiet, then." The cups of coffee were on the floor. The short thick flame of the lantern, like a stubby butterfly's wing, cast a yellow gloom on the walls.

"Now tell," said Tom.

Ma said, "Pa, you tell."

Uncle John slupped his coffee. Pa said, "Well, they dropped the price like you said. An' they was a whole slew a new pickers so goddamn hungry they'd pick for a loaf a bread. Go for a peach, an' somebody'd get it first. Gonna get the whole crop picked right off. Fellas runnin' to a new tree. I seen fights—one fella claims it's his tree, 'nother fella wants to pick off 'n it. Brang these here folks from as far's El Centro. Hungrier'n hell. Work all day for a piece a bread. I says to the checker, 'We can't work for two an' a half cents a box,' an' he says, 'Go on, then, quit. These fellas can.' I says, 'Soon's they get fed up they won't.' An' he says, 'Hell, we'll have these here peaches in 'fore they get fed up.'" Pa stopped.

“She was a devil,” said Uncle John. “They say they’s two hunderd more men comin’ in tonight.”

Tom said, “Yeah! But how about the other?”

Pa was silent for a while. “Tom,” he said, “looks like you done it.”

“I kinda thought so. Couldn’ see. Felt like it.”

“Seems like the people ain’t talkin’ ’bout much else,” said Uncle John. “They got posses out, an’ they’s fellas talkin’ up a lynchin’—’course when they catch the fella.”

Tom looked over at the wide-eyed children. They seldom blinked their eyes. It was as though they were afraid something might happen in the split second of darkness. Tom said, “Well—this fella that done it, he on’y done it after they killed Casy.”

Pa interrupted, “That ain’t the way they’re tellin’ it now. They’re sayin’ he done it fust.”

Tom’s breath sighed out, “Ah-h!”

“They’re workin’ up a feelin’ against us folks. That’s what I heard. All them drum-corpse fellas an’ lodges an’ all that. Say they’re gonna get this here fella.”

“They know what he looks like?” Tom asked.

“Well—not exactly—but the way I heard it, they think he got hit. They think—he’ll have——”

Tom put his hand up slowly and touched his bruised cheek.

Ma cried, “It ain’t so, what they say!”

“Easy, Ma,” Tom said. “They got it cold. Anything them drum-corpse fellas say is right if it’s against us.”

Ma peered through the ill light, and she watched Tom’s face, and particularly his lips. “You promised,” she said.

“Ma, I—maybe this fella oughta go away. If—this fella done somepin wrong, maybe he’d think, ‘O.K. Le’s get the hangin’ over. I done wrong an’ I got to take it.’ But this fella didn’ do nothin’ wrong. He don’ feel no worse’n if he killed a skunk.”

Ruthie broke in, “Ma, me an’ Winfiel’ knows. He don’ have to go this-fella’in’ for us.”

Tom chuckled. “Well, this fella don’ want no hangin’, ’cause he’d do it again. An’ same time, he don’t aim to bring trouble down on his folks. Ma—I got to go.”

Ma covered her mouth with her fingers and coughed to clear her

throat. “You can’t,” she said. “They wouldn’ be no way to hide out. You couldn’ trus’ nobody. But you can trus’ us. We can hide you, an’ we can see you get to eat while your face gets well.”

“But, Ma——”

She got to her feet. “You ain’t goin’. We’re a-takin’ you. Al, you back the truck against the door. Now, I got it figgered out. We’ll put one mattress on the bottom, an’ then Tom gets quick there, an’ we take another mattress an’ sort of fold it so it makes a cave, an’ he’s in the cave; and then we sort of wall it in. He can breathe out the end, ya see. Don’t argue. That’s what we’ll do.”

Pa complained, “Seems like the man ain’t got no say no more. She’s jus’ a heller. Come time we get settled down, I’m a-gonna smack her.”

“Come that time, you can,” said Ma. “Roust up, Al. It’s dark enough.”

Al went outside to the truck. He studied the matter and backed up near the steps.

Ma said, “Quick now. Git that mattress in!”

Pa and Uncle John flung it over the end gate. “Now that one.” They tossed the second mattress up. “Now—Tom, you jump up there an’ git under. Hurry up.”

Tom climbed quickly, and dropped. He straightened one mattress and pulled the second on top of him. Pa bent it upwards, stood it sides up, so that the arch covered Tom. He could see out between the side-boards of the truck. Pa and Al and Uncle John loaded quickly, piled the blankets on top of Tom’s cave, stood the buckets against the sides, spread the last mattress behind. Pots and pans, extra clothes, went in loose, for their boxes had been burned. They were nearly finished loading when a guard moved near, carrying his shotgun across his crooked arm.

“What’s goin’ on here?” he asked.

“We’re goin’ out,” said Pa.

“What for?”

“Well—we got a job offered—good job.”

“Yeah? Where’s it at?”

“Why—down by Weedpatch.”

“Let’s have a look at you.” He turned a flashlight in Pa’s face, in

Uncle John's, and in Al's. "Wasn't there another fella with you?"

Al said, "You mean that hitch-hiker? Little short fella with a pale face?"

"Yeah. I guess that's what he looked like."

"We jus' picked him up on the way in. He went away this mornin' when the rate dropped."

"What did he look like again?"

"Short fella. Pale face."

"Was he bruised up this mornin'?"

"I didn' see nothin'," said Al. "Is the gas pump open?"

"Yeah, till eight."

"Git in," Al cried. "If we're gonna get to Weedpatch 'fore mornin' we gotta ram on. Gettin' in front, Ma?"

"No, I'll set in back," she said. "Pa, you set back here too. Let Rosasharn set in front with Al an' Uncle John."

"Give me the work slip, Pa," said Al. "I'll get gas an' change if I can."

The guard watched them pull along the street and turn left to the gasoline pumps.

"Put in two," said Al.

"You ain't goin' far."

"No, not far. Can I get change on this here work slip?"

"Well—I ain't supposed to."

"Look, mister," Al said. "We got a good job offered if we get there tonight. If we don't, we miss out. Be a good fella."

"Well, O.K. You sign her over to me."

Al got out and walked around the nose of the Hudson. "Sure I will," he said. He unscrewed the water cap and filled the radiator.

"Two, you say?"

"Yeah, two."

"Which way you goin'?"

"South. We got a job."

"Yeah? Jobs is scarce—reg'lar jobs."

"We got a frien'," Al said. "Job's all waitin' for us. Well, so long." The truck swung around and bumped over the dirt street into the road. The feeble headlight jiggled over the way, and the right

headlight blinked on and off from a bad connection. At every jolt the loose pots and pans in the truck-bed jangled and crashed.

Rose of Sharon moaned softly.

"Feel bad?" Uncle John asked.

"Yeah! Feel bad all a time. Wisht I could set still in a nice place. Wisht we was home an' never come. Connie wouldn' a went away if we was home. He would a studied up an' got someplace." Neither Al nor Uncle John answered her. They were embarrassed about Connie.

At the white painted gate to the ranch a guard came to the side of the truck. "Goin' out for good?"

"Yeah," said Al. "Goin' north. Got a job."

The guard turned his flashlight on the truck, turned it up into the tent. Ma and Pa looked stonily down into the glare. "O.K." The guard swung the gate open. The truck turned left and moved toward 101, the great north-south highway.

"Know where we're a-goin'?" Uncle John asked.

"No," said Al. "Jus' goin', an' gettin' goddamn sick of it."

"I ain't so tur'ble far from my time," Rose of Sharon said threateningly. "They better be a nice place for me."

The night air was cold with the first sting of frost. Beside the road the leaves were beginning to drop from the fruit trees. On the load, Ma sat with her back against the truck side, and Pa sat opposite, facing her.

Ma called, "You all right, Tom?"

His muffled voice came back, "Kinda tight in here. We all through the ranch?"

"You be careful," said Ma. "Might git stopped."

Tom lifted up one side of his cave. In the dimness of the truck the pots jangled. "I can pull her down quick," he said. "'Sides, I don' like gettin' trapped in here." He rested up on his elbow. "By God, she's gettin' cold, ain't she?"

"They's clouds up," said Pa. "Fellas says it's gonna be an early winter."

"Squirrels a-buildin' high, or grass seeds?" Tom asked. "By God, you can tell weather from anythin'. I bet you could find a fella could tell weather from a old pair of underdrawers."

“I dunno,” Pa said. “Seems like it’s gittin’ on winter to me. Fella’d have to live here a long time to know.”

“Which way we a-goin’?” Tom asked.

“I dunno. Al, he turned off lef’. Seems like he’s goin’ back the way we come.”

Tom said, “I can’t figger what’s best. Seems like if we get on the main highway they’ll be more cops. With my face this-a-way, they’d pick me right up. Maybe we oughta keep to back roads.”

Ma said, “Hammer on the back. Get Al to stop.”

Tom pounded the front board with his fist; the truck pulled to a stop on the side of the road. Al got out and walked to the back. Ruthie and Winfield peeked out from under their blanket.

“What ya want?” Al demanded.

Ma said, “We got to figger what to do. Maybe we better keep on the back roads. Tom says so.”

“It’s my face,” Tom added. “Anybody’d know. Any cop’d know me.”

“Well, which way you wanta go? I figgered north. We been south.”

“Yeah,” said Tom, “but keep on back roads.”

Al asked, “How ’bout pullin’ off an’ catchin’ some sleep, goin’ on tomorra?”

Ma said quickly, “Not yet. Le’s get some distance fust.”

“O.K.” Al got back in his seat and drove on.

Ruthie and Winfield covered up their heads again. Ma called, “Is Winfiel’ all right?”

“Sure, he’s awright,” Ruthie said. “He been sleepin’.”

Ma leaned back against the truck side. “Gives ya a funny feelin’ to be hunted like. I’m gittin’ mean.”

“Ever’body’s gittin’ mean,” said Pa. “Ever’body. You seen that fight today. Fella changes. Down that gov’ment camp we wasn’ mean.”

Al turned right on a graveled road, and the yellow lights shuddered over the ground. The fruit trees were gone now, and cotton plants took their place. They drove on for twenty miles through the cotton, turning, angling on the country roads. The road paralleled a bushy creek and turned over a concrete bridge and

followed the stream on the other side. And then, on the edge of the creek the lights showed a long line of red boxcars, wheelless; and a big sign on the edge of the road said, “Cotton Pickers Wanted.” Al slowed down. Tom peered between the side-bars of the truck. A quarter of a mile past the boxcars Tom hammered on the car again. Al stopped beside the road and got out again.

“Now what ya want?”

“Shut off the engine an’ climb up here,” Tom said.

Al got into the seat, drove off into the ditch, cut lights and engine. He climbed over the tail gate. “Awright,” he said.

Tom crawled over the pots and knelt in front of Ma. “Look,” he said. “It says they want cotton pickers. I seen that sign. Now I been tryin’ to figger how I’m gonna stay with you, an’ not make no trouble. When my face gets well, maybe it’ll be awright, but not now. Ya see them cars back there. Well, the pickers live in them. Now maybe they’s work there. How about if you get work there an’ live in one of them cars?”

“How ’bout you?” Ma demanded.

“Well, you seen that crick, all full a brush. Well, I could hide in that brush an’ keep outa sight. An’ at night you could bring me out somepin to eat. I seen a culvert, little ways back. I could maybe sleep in there.”

Pa said, “By God, I’d like to get my hands on some cotton! There’s work, I un’erstan’.”

“Them cars might be a purty place to stay,” said Ma. “Nice an’ dry. You think they’s enough brush to hide in, Tom?”

“Sure. I been watchin’. I could fix up a little place, hide away. Soon’s my face gets well, why, I’d come out.”

“You gonna scar purty bad,” said Ma.

“Hell! Ever’body got scars.”

“I picked four hunderd poun’s oncet,” Pa said. “’Course it was a good heavy crop. If we all pick, we could get some money.”

“Could get some meat,” said Al. “What’ll we do right now?”

“Go back there, an’ sleep in the truck till mornin’,” Pa said. “Git work in the mornin’. I can see them bolls even in the dark.”

“How ’bout Tom?” Ma asked.

“Now you jus’ forget me, Ma. I’ll take me a blanket. You look out

on the way back. They's a nice culvert. You can bring me some bread or potatoes, or mush, an' just leave it there. I'll come get it."

"Well!"

"Seems like good sense to me," said Pa.

"It is good sense," Tom insisted. "Soon's my face gets a little better, why, I'll come out an' go to pickin'."

"Well, awright," Ma agreed. "But don' you take no chancet. Don' let nobody see you for a while."

Tom crawled to the back of the truck. "I'll jus' take this here blanket. You look for that culvert on the way back, Ma."

"Take care," she begged. "You take care."

"Sure," said Tom. "Sure I will." He climbed the tail board, stepped down the bank. "Good night," he said.

Ma watched his figure blur with the night and disappear into the bushes beside the stream. "Dear Jesus, I hope it's awright," she said.

Al asked, "You want I should go back now?"

"Yeah," said Pa.

"Go slow," said Ma. "I wanta be sure an' see that culvert he said about. I got to see that."

Al backed and filled on the narrow road, until he had reversed his direction. He drove slowly back to the line of box-cars. The truck lights showed the cat-walks up to the wide car doors. The doors were dark. No one moved in the night. Al shut off his lights.

"You and Uncle John climb up back," he said to Rose of Sharon. "I'll sleep in the seat here."

Uncle John helped the heavy girl to climb up over the tail board. Ma piled the pots in a small space. The family lay wedged close together in the back of the truck.

A baby cried, in long jerking cackles, in one of the boxcars. A dog trotted out, sniffing and snorting, and moved slowly around the Joad truck. The tinkle of moving water came from the streambed.

Chapter 27

Cotton Pickers Wanted—placards on the road, handbills out, orange- colored handbills—Cotton Pickers Wanted.

Here, up this road, it says.

The dark green plants stringy now, and the heavy bolls clutched in the pod. White cotton spilling out like popcorn.

Like to get our hands on the bolls. Tenderly, with the fingertips.

I'm a good picker.

Here's the man, right here.

I aim to pick some cotton.

Got a bag?

Well, no, I ain't.

Cost ya a dollar, the bag. Take it out o' your first hunderd and fifty. Eighty cents a hunderd first time over the field. Ninety cents second time over. Get your bag there. One dollar. 'F you ain't got the buck, we'll take it out of your first hunderd and fifty. That's fair, and you know it.

Sure it's fair. Good cotton bag, last all season. An' when she's wore out, draggin', turn 'er aroun', use the other end. Sew up the open end. Open up the wore end. And when both ends is gone, why, that's nice cloth! Makes a nice pair a summer drawers. Makes nightshirts. And well, hell—a cotton bag's a nice thing.

Hang it around your waist. Straddle it, drag it between your legs. She drags light at first. And your fingertips pick out the fluff, and the hands go twisting into the sack between your legs. Kids come along behind; got no bags for the kids—use a gunny sack or put it in your ol' man's bag. She hangs heavy, some, now. Lean forward, hoist 'er along. I'm a good hand with cotton. Finger-wise, boll-wise. Jes' move along talkin', an' maybe singin' till the bag gets heavy. Fingers go right to it. Fingers know. Eyes see the work—and don't see it.

Talkin' across the rows——

They was a lady back home, won't mention no names—had a nigger kid all of a sudden. Nobody knowed before. Never did hunt out the nigger. Couldn' never hold up her head no more. But I started to tell—she was a good picker.

Now the bag is heavy, boost it along. Set your hips and tow it along, like a work horse. And the kids pickin' into the old man's sack. Good crop here. Gets thin in the low places, thin and stringy. Never seen no cotton like this here California cotton. Long fiber, bes' damn cotton I ever seen. Spoil the lan' pretty soon. Like a fella wants to buy some cotton lan'—Don' buy her, rent her. Then when she's cottoned on down, move someplace new.

Lines of people moving across the fields. Finger-wise. Inquisitive fingers snick in and out and find the bolls. Hardly have to look.

Bet I could pick cotton if I was blind. Got a feelin' for a cotton boll. Pick clean, clean as a whistle.

Sack's full now. Take her to the scales. Argue. Scale man says you got rocks to make weight. How 'bout him? His scales is fixed. Sometimes he's right, you got rocks in the sack. Sometimes you're right, the scales is crooked. Sometimes both; rocks an' crooked scales. Always argue, always fight. Keeps your head up. An' his head up. What's a few rocks? Jus' one, maybe. Quarter pound? Always argue.

Back with the empty sack. Got our own book. Mark in the weight. Got to. If they know you're markin', then they don't cheat. But God he'p ya if ya don' keep your own weight.

This is good work. Kids runnin' aroun'. Heard 'bout the cotton-pickin' machine?

Yeah, I heard.

Think it'll ever come?

Well, if it comes—fella says it'll put han' pickin' out.

Come night. All tired. Good pickin', though. Got three dollars, me an' the ol' woman an' the kids.

The cars move to the cotton fields. The cotton camps set up. The screened high trucks and trailers are piled high with white fluff. Cotton clings to the fence wires, and cotton rolls in little balls along the road when the wind blows. And clean white cotton, going to the gin. And the big, lumpy bales standing, going to the compress. And cotton clinging to your clothes and stuck to your whiskers. Blow your nose, there's cotton in your nose.

Hunch along now, fill up the bag 'fore dark. Wise fingers seeking in the bolls. Hips hunching along, dragging the bag. Kids are tired, now in the evening. They trip over their feet in the cultivated earth.

And the sun is going down.

Wisht it would last. It ain't much money, God knows, but I wisht it would last.

On the highway the old cars piling in, drawn by the handbills.

Got a cotton bag?

No.

Cost ya a dollar, then.

If they was on'y fifty of us, we could stay awhile, but they's five hunderd. She won't last hardly at all. I knowed a fella never did git his bag paid out. Ever' job he got a new bag, an' ever' fiel' was done 'fore he got his weight.

Try for God's sake ta save a little money! Winter's comin' fast. They ain't no work at all in California in the winter. Fill up the bag 'fore it's dark. I seen that fella put two clods in.

Well, hell. Why not? I'm jus' balancin' the crooked scales.

Now here's my book, three hunderd an' twelve poun's.

Right!

Jesus, he never argued! His scales mus' be crooked. Well, that's a nice day anyways.

They say a thousan' men are on their way to this field. We'll be fightin' for a row tomorra. We'll be snatchin' cotton, quick.

Cotton Pickers Wanted. More men picking, quicker to the gin.

Now into the cotton camp.

Side-meat tonight, by God! We got money for side-meat! Stick out a han' to the little fella, he's wore out. Run in ahead an' git us four poun' of side-meat. The ol' woman'll make some nice biscuits tonight, ef she ain't too tired.

Chapter 28

The boxcars, twelve of them, stood end to end on a little flat beside the stream. There were two rows of six each, the wheels removed. Up to the big sliding doors slatted planks ran for cat-walks. They made good houses, water-tight and draftless, room for twenty-four families, one family in each end of each car. No windows, but the wide doors stood open. In some of the cars a canvas hung down in the center of the car, while in others only the position of the door made the boundary.

The Joads had one end of an end car. Some previous occupant had fitted up an oil can with a stovepipe, had made a hole in the wall for the stovepipe. Even with the wide door open, it was dark in the ends of the car. Ma hung the tarpaulin across the middle of the car.

"It's nice," she said. "It's almost nicer than anything we had 'cept the gov'ment camp."

Each night she unrolled the mattresses on the floor, and each morning rolled them up again. And every day they went into the fields and picked the cotton, and every night they had meat. On a Saturday they drove into Tulare, and they bought a tin stove and new overalls for Al and Pa and Winfield and Uncle John, and they bought a dress for Ma and gave Ma's best dress to Rose of Sharon.

"She's so big," Ma said. "Jus' a waste of good money to get her a new dress now."

The Joads had been lucky. They got in early enough to have a place in the boxcars. Now the tents of the late-comers filled the little flat, and those who had the boxcars were old timers, and in a way aristocrats.

The narrow stream slipped by, out of the willows, and back into the willows again. From each car a hard-beaten path went down to the stream. Between the cars the clothes lines hung, and every day the lines were covered with drying clothes.

In the evening they walked back from the fields, carrying their folded cotton bags under their arms. They went into the store which stood at the crossroads, and there were many pickers in the store, buying their supplies.

“How much today?”

“We’re doin’ fine. We made three and a half today. Wisht she’d keep up. Them kids is gettin’ to be good pickers. Ma’s worked ’em up a little bag for each. They couldn’ tow a growed-up bag. Dump into ours. Made bags outa a couple old shirts. Work fine.”

And Ma went to the meat counter, her forefinger pressed against her lips, blowing on her finger, thinking deeply. “Might get some pork chops,” she said. “How much?”

“Thirty cents a pound, ma’am.”

“Well, lemme have three poun’s. An’ a nice piece a boilin’ beef. My girl can cook it tomorra. An’ a bottle a milk for my girl. She dotes on milk. Gonna have a baby. Nurse-lady tol’ her to eat lots a milk. Now, le’s see, we got potatoes.”

Pa came close, carrying a can of sirup in his hands. “Might get this here,” he said. “Might have some hotcakes.”

Ma frowned. “Well—well, yes. Here, we’ll take this here. Now—we got plenty lard.”

Ruthie came near, in her hands two large boxes of Cracker Jack, in her eyes a brooding question, which on a nod or a shake of Ma’s head might become tragedy or joyous excitement. “Ma?” She held up the boxes, jerked them up and down to make them attractive.

“Now you put them back——”

The tragedy began to form in Ruthie’s eyes. Pa said, “They’re on’y nickel apiece. Them little fellas worked good today.”

“Well —” The excitement began to steal into Ruthie’s eyes. “Awright.”

Ruthie turned and fled. Halfway to the door she caught Winfield and rushed him out the door, into the evening.

Uncle John fingered a pair of canvas gloves with yellow leather palms, tried them on and took them off and laid them down. He moved gradually to the liquor shelves, and he stood studying the labels on the bottles. Ma saw him. “Pa,” she said, and motioned with her head toward Uncle John.

Pa lounged over to him. “Gettin’ thirsty, John?”

“No, I ain’t.”

“Jus’ wait till cotton’s done,” said Pa. “Then you can go on a hell of a drunk.”

"'Tain't sweatin' me none," Uncle John said. "I'm workin' hard an' sleepin' good. No dreams nor nothin'."

"Jus' seen you sort of droolin' out at them bottles."

"I didn' hardly see 'em. Funny thing. I wanta buy stuff. Stuff I don't need. Like to git one a them safety razors. Thought I'd like to have some a them gloves over there. Awful cheap."

"Can't pick no cotton with gloves," said Pa.

"I know that. An' I don't need no safety razor, neither. Stuff settin' out there, you jus' feel like buyin' it whether you need it or not."

Ma called, "Come on. We got ever'thing." She carried a bag. Uncle John and Pa each took a package. Outside Ruthie and Winfield were waiting, their eyes strained, their cheeks puffed and full of Cracker Jack.

"Won't eat no supper, I bet," Ma said.

People streamed toward the boxcar camp. The tents were lighted. Smoke poured from the stovepipes. The Joads climbed up their catwalk and into their end of the boxcar. Rose of Sharon sat on a box beside the stove. She had a fire started, and the tin stove was wine-colored with heat. "Did ya get milk?" she demanded.

"Yeah. Right here."

"Give it to me. I ain't had any sence noon."

"She thinks it's like medicine."

"That nurse-lady says so."

"You got potatoes ready?"

"Right there—peeled."

"We'll fry 'em," said Ma. "Got pork chops. Cut up them potatoes in the new fry pan. And th'ow in a onion. You fellas go out an' wash, an' bring in a bucket a water. Where's Ruthie an' Winfiel'? They oughta wash. They each got Cracker Jack," Ma told Rose of Sharon. "Each got a whole box."

The men went out to wash in the stream. Rose of Sharon sliced the potatoes into the frying pan and stirred them about with the knife point.

Suddenly the tarpaulin was thrust aside. A stout perspiring face looked in from the other end of the car. "How'd you all make out, Mis' Joad?"

Ma swung around. “Why, evenin’, Mis’ Wainwright. We done good. Three an’ a half. Three fifty-seven, exact.”

“We done four dollars.”

“Well,” said Ma. “’Course they’s more *of* you.”

“Yeah. Jonas is growin’ up. Havin’ pork chops, I see.”

Winfield crept in through the door. “Ma!”

“Hush a minute. Yes, my men jus’ loves pork chops.”

“I’m cookin’ bacon,” said Mrs. Wainwright. “Can you smell it cookin’?”

“No—can’t smell it over these here onions in the potatoes.”

“She’s burnin’!” Mrs. Wainwright cried, and her head jerked back.

“Ma,” Winfield said.

“What? You sick from Cracker Jack?”

“Ma—Ruthie tol’.”

“Tol’ what?”

“’Bout Tom.”

Ma stared. “Tol’?” Then she knelt in front of him. “Winfiel’, who’d she tell?”

Embarrassment seized Winfield. He backed away. “Well, she on’y tol’ a little bit.”

“Winfiel’! Now you tell what she said.”

“She—she didn’ eat all her Cracker Jack. She kep’ some, an’ she et jus’ one piece at a time, slow, like she always done, an’ she says, ‘Bet you wisht you had some lef’.”

“Winfiel’!” Ma demanded. “You tell now.” She looked back nervously at the curtain. “Rosasharn, you go over talk to Mis’ Wainwright so she don’ listen.”

“How ’bout these here potatoes?”

“I’ll watch ’em. Now you go. I don’ want her listenin’ at that curtain.” The girl shuffled heavily down the car and went around the side of the hung tarpaulin.

Ma said, “Now, Winfiel’, you tell.”

“Like I said, she et jus’ one little piece at a time, an’ she bust some in two so it’d las’ longer.”

“Go on, hurry up.”

“Well, some kids come aroun’, an’ ’course they tried to get some,

but Ruthie, she jus' nibbled an' nibbled, an' wouldn' give 'em none. So they got mad. An' one kid grabbed her Cracker Jack box."

"Winfiel', you tell quick about the other."

"I am," he said. "So Ruthie got mad an' chased 'em, an' she fit one, an' then she fit another, an' then one big girl up an' licked her. Hit 'er a good one. So then Ruthie cried, an' she said she'd git her big brother, an' he'd kill that big girl. An' that big girl said, Oh, yeah? Well, she got a big brother too." Winfield was breathless in his telling. "So then they fit, an' that big girl hit Ruthie a good one, an' Ruthie said her brother'd kill that big girl's brother. An' that big girl said how about if her brother kil't our brother. An' then—an' then, Ruthie said our brother already kil't two fellas. An'—an'—that big girl said, 'Oh, yeah! You're jus' a little smarty liar.' An' Ruthie said, Oh, yeah? Well, our brother's a-hidin' right now from killin' a fella, an' he can kill that big girl's brother too. An' then they called names an' Ruthie throwed a rock, an' that big girl chased her, an' I come home."

"Oh, my!" Ma said wearily. "Oh! My dear sweet Lord Jesus asleep in a manger! What we goin' to do now?" She put her forehead in her hand and rubbed her eyes. "What we gonna do now?" A smell of burning potatoes came from the roaring stove. Ma moved automatically and turned them.

"Rosasharn!" Ma called. The girl appeared around the curtain. "Come watch this here supper. Winfiel', you go out an' you fin' Ruthie an' bring her back here."

"Gonna whup her, Ma?" he asked hopefully.

"No. This here you couldn' do nothin' about. Why, I wonder, did she haf' to do it? No. It won't do no good to whup her. Run now, an'find her an' bring her back."

Winfield ran for the car door, and he met the three men tramping up the cat-walk, and he stood aside while they came in.

Ma said softly, "Pa, I got to talk to you. Ruthie tol' some kids how Tom's a-hidin'."

"What?"

"She tol'. Got in a fight an' tol'."

"Why, the little bitch!"

"No, she didn' know what she was a-doin'. Now look, Pa. I want you to stay here. I'm goin' out an' try to fin' Tom an' tell him. I got

to tell 'im to be careful. You stick here, Pa, an' kinda watch out for things. I'll take 'im some dinner."

"Awright," Pa agreed.

"Don' you even mention to Ruthie what she done. I'll tell her."

At that moment Ruthie came in, with Winfield behind her. The little girl was dirtied. Her mouth was sticky, and her nose still dripped a little blood from her fight. She looked shamed and frightened. Winfield triumphantly followed her. Ruthie looked fiercely about, but she went to a corner of the car and put her back in the corner. Her shame and fierceness were blended.

"I tol' her what she done," Winfield said.

Ma was putting two chops and some fried potatoes on a tin plate. "Hush, Winfiel'," she said. "They ain't no need to hurt her feelings no more'n what they're hurt."

Ruthie's body hurtled across the car. She grabbed Ma around the middle and buried her head in Ma's stomach, and her strangled sobs shook her whole body. Ma tried to loosen her, but the grubby fingers clung tight. Ma brushed the hair on the back of her head gently, and she patted her shoulders. "Hush," she said. "You didn' know."

Ruthie raised her dirty, tear-stained, bloody face. "They stoled my Cracker Jack!" she cried. "That big son-of-a-bitch of a girl, she belted me —" She went off into hard crying again.

"Hush!" Ma said. "Don' talk like that. Here. Let go. I'm a-goin' now."

"Whyn't ya whup her, Ma? If she didn't git snotty with her Cracker Jack 'twouldn' a happened. Go on, give her a whup."

"You jus' min' your business, mister," Ma said fiercely. "You'll git a whup yourself. Now leggo, Ruthie."

Winfield retired to a rolled mattress, and he regarded the family cynically and dully. And he put himself in a good position of defense, for Ruthie would attack him at the first opportunity, and he knew it. Ruthie went quietly, heartbrokenly to the other side of the car.

Ma put a sheet of newspaper over the tin plate. "I'm a-goin' now," she said.

"Ain't you gonna eat nothin' yourself ?" Uncle John demanded.

"Later. When I come back. I wouldn' want nothin' now." Ma

walked to the open door; she steadied herself down the steep, cleated cat-walk.

On the stream side of the boxcars, the tents were pitched close together, their guy ropes crossing one another, and the pegs of one at the canvas line of the next. The lights shone through the cloth, and all the chimneys belched smoke. Men and women stood in the doorways talking. Children ran feverishly about. Ma moved majestically down the line of tents. Here and there she was recognized as she went by. “Evenin’, Mis’ Joad.”

“Evenin’.”

“Takin’ somepin out, Mis’ Joad?”

“They’s a frien’. I’m takin’ back some bread.”

She came at last to the end of the line of tents. She stopped and looked back. A glow of light was on the camp, and the soft overtone of a multitude of speakers. Now and then a harsher voice cut through. The smell of smoke filled the air. Someone played a harmonica softly, trying for an effect, one phrase over and over.

Ma stepped in among the willows beside the stream. She moved off the trail and waited, silently, listening to hear any possible follower. A man walked down the trail toward the camp, boosting his suspenders and buttoning his jeans as he went. Ma sat very still, and he passed on without seeing her. She waited five minutes and then she stood up and crept on up the trail beside the stream. She moved quietly, so quietly that she could hear the murmur of the water above her soft steps on the willow leaves. Trail and stream swung to the left and then to the right again until they neared the highway. In the gray starlight she could see the embankment and the black round hole of the culvert where she always left Tom’s food. She moved forward cautiously, thrust her package into the hole, and took back the empty tin plate which was left there. She crept back among the willows, forced her way into a thicket, and sat down to wait. Through the tangle she could see the black hole of the culvert. She clasped her knees and sat silently. In a few moments the thicket crept to life again. The field mice moved cautiously over the leaves. A skunk padded heavily and unself-consciously down the trail, carrying a faint effluvium with him. And then a wind stirred the willows delicately, as though it tested them, and a shower of golden leaves coasted down to the ground. Suddenly a gust boiled in and racked the trees, and a cricking

downpour of leaves fell. Ma could feel them on her hair and on her shoulders. Over the sky a plump black cloud moved, erasing the stars. The fat drops of rain scattered down, splashing loudly on the fallen leaves, and the cloud moved on and unveiled the stars again. Ma shivered. The wind blew past and left the thicket quiet, but the rushing of the trees went on down the stream. From back at the camp came the thin penetrating tone of a violin feeling about for a tune.

Ma heard a stealthy step among the leaves far to her left, and she grew tense. She released her knees and straightened her head, the better to hear. The movement stopped, and after a long moment began again. A vine rasped harshly on the dry leaves. Ma saw a dark figure creep into the open and draw near to the culvert. The black round hole was obscured for a moment, and then the figure moved back. She called softly, "Tom!" The figure stood still, so still, so low to the ground that it might have been a stump. She called again, "Tom, oh, Tom!" Then the figure moved.

"That you, Ma?"

"Right over here." She stood up and went to meet him.

"You shouldn' of came," he said.

"I got to see you, Tom. I got to talk to you."

"It's near the trail," he said. "Somebody might come by."

"Ain't you got a place, Tom?"

"Yeah—but if—well, s'pose somebody seen you with me—whole fambly'd be in a jam."

"I got to, Tom."

"Then come along. Come quiet." He crossed the little stream, wading carelessly through the water, and Ma followed him. He moved through the brush, out into a field on the other side of the thicket, and along the plowed ground. The blackening stems of the cotton were harsh against the ground, and a few fluffs of cotton clung to the stems. A quarter of a mile they went along the edge of the field, and then he turned into the brush again. He approached a great mound of wild blackberry bushes, leaned over and pulled a mat of vines aside. "You got to crawl in," he said.

Ma went down on her hands and knees. She felt sand under her, and then the black inside of the mound no longer touched her, and she felt Tom's blanket on the ground. He arranged the vines in

place again. It was lightless in the cave.

"Where are you, Ma?"

"Here. Right here. Talk soft, Tom."

"Don't worry. I been livin' like a rabbit some time."

She heard him unwrap his tin plate.

"Pork chops," she said. "And fry potatoes."

"God Awmighty, an' still warm."

Ma could not see him at all in the blackness, but she could hear him chewing, tearing at the meat and swallowing.

"It's a pretty good hide-out," he said.

Ma said uneasily, "Tom—Ruthie tol' about you." She heard him gulp.

"Ruthie? What for?"

"Well, it wasn' her fault. Got in a fight, an' says her brother'll lick that other girl's brother. You know how they do. An' she tol' that her brother killed a man an' was hidin'."

Tom was chuckling. "With me I was always gonna get Uncle John after 'em, but he never would do it. That's jus' kid talk, Ma. That's awright."

"No, it ain't," Ma said. "Them kids'll tell it aroun' an' then the folks'll hear, an' they'll tell aroun', an' pretty soon, well, they liable to get men out to look, jus' in case. Tom, you got to go away."

"That's what I said right along. I was always scared somebody'd see you put stuff in that culvert, an' then they'd watch."

"I know. But I wanted you near. I was scared for you. I ain't seen you. Can't see you now. How's your face?"

"Gettin' well quick."

"Come clost, Tom. Let me feel it. Come clost." He crawled near. Her reaching hand found his head in the blackness and her fingers moved down to his nose, and then over his left cheek. "You got a bad scar, Tom. An' your nose is all crooked."

"Maybe tha's a good thing. Nobody wouldn't know me, maybe. If my prints wasn't on record, I'd be glad." He went back to his eating.

"Hush," she said. "Listen!"

"It's the wind, Ma. Jus' the wind." The gust poured down the stream, and the trees rustled under its passing.

She crawled close to his voice. “I wanta touch ya again, Tom. It’s like I’m blin’, it’s so dark. I wanta remember, even if it’ son’y my fingers that remember. You got to go away, Tom.”

“Yeah! I knowed it from the start.”

“We made purty good,” she said. “I been squirrelin’ money away. Hol’ out your han’, Tom. I got seven dollars here.”

“I ain’t gonna take ya money,” he said. “I’ll get ’long all right.”

“Hol’ out ya han’, Tom. I ain’t gonna sleep none if you got no money. Maybe you got to take a bus, or somepin. I want you should go a long ways off, three-four hunderd miles.”

“I ain’t gonna take it.”

“Tom,” she said sternly. “You take this money. You hear me? You got no right to cause me pain.”

“You ain’t playin’ fair,” he said.

“I thought maybe you could go to a big city. Los Angeles, maybe. They wouldn’ never look for you there.”

“Hm-m,” he said. “Lookie, Ma. I been all day an’ all night hidin’ alone. Guess who I been thinkin’ about? Casy! He talked a lot. Used ta bother me. But now I been thinkin’ what he said, an’ I can remember—all of it. Says one time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, an’ he foun’ he didn’ have no soul that was his’n. Says he foun’ he jus’ got a little piece of a great big soul. Says a wilderness ain’t no good, ’cause his little piece of a soul wasn’t no good ’less it was with the rest, an’ was whole. Funny how I remember. Didn’ think I was even listenin’. But I know now a fella ain’t no good alone.”

“He was a good man,” Ma said.

Tom went on, “He spouted out some Scripture once, an’ it didn’ soun’ like no hell-fire Scripture. He tol’ it twicet, an’ I remember it. Says it’s from the Preacher.”

“How’s it go, Tom?”

“Goes, ‘Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lif’ up his fellow, but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, for he hath not another to help him up.’ That’s part of her.”

“Go on,” Ma said. “Go on, Tom.”

“Jus’ a little bit more. ‘Again, if two lie together, then they have

heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him, and a three-fold cord is not quickly broken.”’

“An’ that’s Scripture?”

“Casy said it was. Called it the Preacher.”

“Hush—listen.”

“On’y the wind, Ma. I know the wind. An’ I got to thinkin’, Ma—most of the preachin’ is about the poor we shall have always with us, an’ if you got nothin’, why, jus’ fol’ your hands an’ to hell with it, you gonna git ice cream on gol’ plates when you’re dead. An’ then this here Preacher says two get a better reward for their work.”

“Tom,” she said. “What you aimin’ to do?”

He was quiet for a long time. “I been thinkin’ how it was in that gov’ment camp, how our folks took care a theirselves, an’ if they was a fight they fixed it theirself; an’ they wasn’t no cops wagglin’ their guns, but they was better order than them cops ever give. I been a-wonderin’ why we can’t do that all over. Throw out the cops that ain’t our people. All work together for our own thing—all farm our own lan’.”

“Tom,” Ma repeated, “what you gonna do?”

“What Casy done,” he said.

“But they killed him.”

“Yeah,” said Tom. “He didn’ duck quick enough. He wasn’ doing nothin’ against the law, Ma. I been thinkin’ a hell of a lot, thinkin’ about our people livin’ like pigs, an’ the good rich lan’ layin’ fallow, or maybe one fella with a million acres, while a hunderd thousan’ good farmers is starvin’. An’ I been wonderin’ if all our folks got together an’ yelled, like them fellas yelled, only a few of ’em at the Hooper ranch——”

Ma said, “Tom, they’ll drive you, an’ cut you down like they done to young Floyd.”

“They gonna drive me anyways. They drivin’ all our people.”

“You don’t aim to kill nobody, Tom?”

“No. I been thinkin’, long as I’m a outlaw anyways, maybe I could—Hell, I ain’t thought it out clear, Ma. Don’ worry me now. Don’ worry me.”

They sat silent in the coal-black cave of vines. Ma said, “How’m I gonna know ’bout you? They might kill ya an’ I wouldn’ know. They might hurt ya. How’m I gonna know?”

Tom laughed uneasily, “Well, maybe like Casy says, a fella ain’t got a soul of his own, but on’y a piece of a big one—an’ then——”

“Then what, Tom?”

“Then it don’ matter. Then I’ll be all aroun’ in the dark. I’ll be ever’where—wherever you look. Wherever they’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever they’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I’ll be in the way guys yell when they’re mad an’—I’ll be in the way kids laugh when they’re hungry an’ they know supper’s ready. An’ when our folks eat the stuff they raise an’ live in the houses they build—why, I’ll be there. See? God, I’m talkin’ like Casy. Comes of thinkin’ about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes.”

“I don’ un’erstan’,” Ma said. “I don’ really know.”

“Me neither,” said Tom. “It’s jus’ stuff I been thinkin’ about. Get thinkin’ a lot when you ain’t movin’ aroun’. You got to get back, Ma.”

“You take the money then.”

He was silent for a moment. “Awright,” he said.

“An’, Tom, later—when it’s blowed over, you’ll come back. You’ll find us?”

“Sure,” he said. “Now you better go. Here, gimme your han’.” He guided her toward the entrance. Her fingers clutched his wrist. He swept the vines aside and followed her out. “Go up to the field till you come to a sycamore on the edge, an’ then cut acrost the stream. Good-by.”

“Good-by,” she said, and she walked quickly away. Her eyes were wet and burning, but she did not cry. Her footsteps were loud and careless on the leaves as she went through the brush. And as she went, out of the dim sky the rain began to fall, big drops and few, splashing on the dry leaves heavily. Ma stopped and stood still in the dripping thicket. She turned about—took three steps back toward the mound of vines; and then she turned quickly and went back toward the boxcar camp. She went straight out to the culvert and climbed up on the road. The rain had passed now, but the sky was overcast. Behind her on the road she heard footsteps, and she

turned nervously. The blinking of a dim flashlight played on the road. Ma turned back and started for home. In a moment a man caught up with her. Politely, he kept his light on the ground and did not play it in her face.

"Evenin'," he said.

Ma said, "Howdy."

"Looks like we might have a little rain."

"I hope not. Stop the pickin'. We need the pickin'."

"I need the pickin' too. You live at the camp there?"

"Yes, sir." Their footsteps beat on the road together.

"I got twenty acres of cotton. Little late, but it's ready now. Thought I'd go down and try to get some pickers."

"You'll get 'em awright. Season's near over."

"Hope so. My place is only a mile up that way."

"Six of us," said Ma. "Three men an' me an' two little fellas."

"I'll put out a sign. Two miles—this road."

"We'll be there in the mornin'."

"I hope it don't rain."

"Me too," said Ma. "Twenty acres won' las' long."

"The less it lasts the gladder I'll be. My cotton's late. Didn' get it in till late."

"What you payin', mister?"

"Ninety cents."

"We'll pick. I hear fellas say nex' year it'll be seventy-five or even sixty."

"That's what I hear."

"They'll be trouble," said Ma.

"Sure. I know. Little fella like me can't do anything. The Association sets the rate, and we got to mind. If we don't—we ain't got a farm. Little fella gets crowded all the time."

They came to the camp. "We'll be there," Ma said. "Not much pickin' lef '." She went to the end boxcar and climbed the cleated walk. The low light of the lantern made gloomy shadows in the car. Pa and Uncle John and an elderly man squatted against the car wall.

"Hello," Ma said. "Evenin', Mr. Wainwright."

He raised a delicately chiseled face. His eyes were deep under the ridges of his brows. His hair was blue-white and fine. A patina of silver beard covered his jaws and chin. “Evenin’, ma’am,” he said.

“We got pickin’ tomorra,” Ma observed. “Mile north. Twenty acres.”

“Better take the truck, I guess,” Pa said. “Get in more pickin’.”

Wainwright raised his head eagerly. “S’pose we can pick?”

“Why, sure. I walked a piece with the fella. He was comin’ to get pickers.”

“Cotton’s nearly gone. Purty thin, these here seconds. Gonna be hard to make a wage on the seconds. Got her pretty clean the fust time.”

“Your folks could maybe ride with us,” Ma said. “Split the gas.”

“Well—that’s frien’ly of you, ma’am.”

“Saves us both,” said Ma.

Pa said, “Mr. Wainwright—he’s got a worry he come to us about. We was a-talkin’ her over.”

“What’s the matter?”

Wainwright looked down at the floor. “Our Aggie,” he said. “She’s a big girl—near sixteen, an’ growed up.”

“Aggie’s a pretty girl,” said Ma.

“Listen ’im out,” Pa said.

“Well, her an’ your boy Al, they’re a-walkin’ out ever’ night. An’ Aggie’s a good healthy girl that oughta have a husban’, else she might git in trouble. We never had no trouble in our family. But what with us bein’ so poor off, now, Mis’ Wainwright an’ me, we got to worryin’. S’pose she got in trouble?”

Ma rolled down a mattress and sat on it. “They out now?” she asked.

“Always out,” said Wainwright. “Ever’ night.”

“Hm. Well, Al’s a good boy. Kinda figgers he’s a dung-hill rooster these days, but he’s a good steady boy. I couldn’ want for a better boy.”

“Oh, we ain’t complainin’ about Al as a fella! We like him. But what scares Mis’ Wainwright an’ me—well, she’s a growed-up woman-girl. An’ what if we go away, or you go away, an’ we find out Aggie’s in trouble? We ain’t had no shame in our family.”

Ma said softly, “We’ll try an’ see that we don’t put no shame on you.”

He stood up quickly. “Thank you, ma’am. Aggie’s a growed-up woman-girl. She’s a good girl—jes’ as nice an’ good. We’ll sure thank you, ma’am, if you’ll keep shame from us. It ain’t Aggie’s fault. She’s growed up.”

“Pa’ll talk to Al,” said Ma. “Or if Pa won’t, I will.”

Wainwright said, “Good night, then, an’ we sure thank ya.” He went around the end of the curtain. They could hear him talking softly in the other end of the car, explaining the result of his embassy.

Ma listened a moment, and then, “You fellas,” she said. “Come over an’ set here.”

Pa and Uncle John got heavily up from their squats. They sat on the mattress beside Ma.

“Where’s the little fellas?”

Pa pointed to a mattress in the corner. “Ruthie, she jumped Winfiel’ an’ bit ’im. Made ’em both lay down. Guess they’re asleep. Rosasharn, she went to set with a lady she knows.”

Ma sighed. “I foun’ Tom,” she said softly. “I—sent ’im away. Far off.”

Pa nodded slowly. Uncle John dropped his chin on his chest. “Couldn’ do nothin’ else,” Pa said. “Think he could, John?”

Uncle John looked up. “I can’t think nothin’ out,” he said. “Don’t seem like I’m hardly awake no more.”

“Tom’s a good boy,” Ma said; and then she apologized, “I didn’ mean no harm a-sayin’ I’d talk to Al.”

“I know,” Pa said quietly. “I ain’t no good any more. Spen’ all my time a-thinkin’ how it use’ ta be. Spen’ all my time thinkin’ of home, an’ I ain’t never gonna see it no more.”

“This here’s purtier—better lan’,” said Ma.

“I know. I never even see it, thinkin’ how the willow’s los’ its leaves now. Sometimes figgerin’ to mend that hole in the south fence. Funny! Woman takin’ over the fambly. Woman sayin’ we’ll do this here, an’ we’ll go there. An’ I don’ even care.”

“Woman can change better’n a man,” Ma said soothingly. “Woman got all her life in her arms. Man got it all in his head. Don’

you mind. Maybe—well, maybe nex' year we can get a place."

"We got nothin', now," Pa said. "Comin' a long time—no work, no crops. What we gonna do then? How we gonna git stuff to eat? An' I tell you Rosasharn ain't so far from due. Git so I hate to think. Go diggin' back to a ol' time to keep from thinkin'. Seems like our life's over an' done."

"No, it ain't," Ma smiled. "It ain't, Pa. An' that's one more thing a woman knows. I noticed that. Man, he lives in jerks—baby born an' a man dies, an' that's a jerk—gets a farm an' loses his farm, an' that's a jerk. Woman, it's all one flow, like a stream, little eddies, little waterfalls, but the river, it goes right on. Woman looks at it like that. We ain't gonna die out. People is goin' on—changin' a little, maybe, but goin' right on."

"How can you tell?" Uncle John demanded. "What's to keep ever'thing from stoppin'; all the folks from jus' gittin' tired an' layin' down?"

Ma considered. She rubbed the shiny back of one hand with the other, pushed the fingers of her right hand between the fingers of her left. "Hard to say," she said. "Ever'thing we do—seems to me is aimed right at goin' on. Seems that way to me. Even gettin' hungry—even bein' sick; some die, but the rest is tougher. Jus' try to live the day, jus' the day."

Uncle John said, "If on'y she didn' die that time——"

"Jus' live the day," Ma said. "Don' worry yaself."

"They might be a good year nex' year, back home," said Pa.

Ma said, "Listen!"

There were creeping steps on the cat-walk, and then Al came in past the curtain. "Hullo," he said. "I thought you'd be sleepin' by now."

"Al," Ma said. "We're a-talkin'. Come set here."

"Sure—O.K. I wanta talk too. I'll hafta be goin' away pretty soon now."

"You can't. We need you here. Why you got to go away?"

"Well, me an' Aggie Wainwright, we figgers to get married, an' I'm gonna git a job in a garage, an' we'll have a rent' house for a while, an'—" He looked up fiercely. "Well, we are, an' they ain't nobody can stop us!"

They were staring at him. "Al," Ma said at last, "we're glad. We're

awful glad."

"You are?"

"Why, 'course we are. You're a growed man. You need a wife. But don' go right now, Al."

"I promised Aggie," he said. "We got to go. We can't stan' this no more."

"Jus' stay till spring," Ma begged. "Jus' till spring. Won't you stay till spring? Who'd drive the truck?"

"Well——"

Mrs. Wainwright put her head around the curtain. "You heard yet?" she demanded.

"Yeah! Jus' heard."

"Oh, my! I wisht—I wisht we had a cake. I wisht we had—a cake or somepin."

"I'll set on some coffee an' make up some pancakes," Ma said. "We got sirup."

"Oh, my!" Mrs. Wainwright said. "Why—well. Look, I'll bring some sugar. We'll put sugar in them pancakes."

Ma broke twigs into the stove, and the coals from the dinner cooking started them blazing. Ruthie and Winfield came out of their bed like hermit crabs from shells. For a moment they were careful; they watched to see whether they were still criminals. When no one noticed them, they grew bold. Ruthie hopped all the way to the door and back on one foot, without touching the wall.

Ma was pouring flour into a bowl when Rose of Sharon climbed the cat-walk. She steadied herself and advanced cautiously. "What's a matter?" she asked.

"Why, it's news!" Ma cried. "We're gonna have a little party 'count a Al an' Aggie Wainwright is gonna get married."

Rose of Sharon stood perfectly still. She looked slowly at Al, who stood there flustered and embarrassed.

Mrs. Wainwright shouted from the other end of the car, "I'm puttin' a fresh dress on Aggie. I'll be right over."

Rose of Sharon turned slowly. She went back to the wide door, and she crept down the cat-walk. Once on the ground, she moved slowly toward the stream and the trail that went beside it. She took the way Ma had gone earlier—into the willows. The wind blew

more steadily now, and the bushes whished steadily. Rose of Sharon went down on her knees and crawled deep into the brush. The berry vines cut her face and pulled at her hair, but she didn't mind. Only when she felt the bushes touching her all over did she stop. She stretched out on her back. And she felt the weight of the baby inside of her.

In the lightless car, Ma stirred, and then she pushed the blanket back and got up. At the open door of the car the gray starlight penetrated a little. Ma walked to the door and stood looking out. The stars were paling in the east. The wind blew softly over the willow thickets, and from the little stream came the quiet talking of the water. Most of the camp was still asleep, but in front of one tent a little fire burned, and people were standing about it, warming themselves. Ma could see them in the light of the new dancing fire as they stood facing the flames, rubbing their hands; and then they turned their backs and held their hands behind them. For a long moment Ma looked out, and she held her hands clasped in front of her. The uneven wind whisked up and passed, and a bite of frost was in the air. Ma shivered and rubbed her hands together. She crept back and fumbled for the matches, beside the lantern. The shade screeched up. She lighted the wick, watched it burn blue for a moment and then put up its yellow, delicately curved ring of light. She carried the lantern to the stove and set it down while she broke the brittle dry willow twigs into the fire box. In a moment the fire was roaring up the chimney.

Rose of Sharon rolled heavily over and sat up. "I'll git right up," she said.

"Whyn't you lay a minute till it warms?" Ma asked.

"No, I'll git."

Ma filled the coffee pot from the bucket and set it on the stove, and she put on the frying pan, deep with fat, to get hot for the pones. "What's over you?" she said softly.

"I'm a-goin' out," Rose of Sharon said.

"Out where?"

"Goin' out to pick cotton."

"You can't," Ma said. "You're too far along."

"No, I ain't. An' I'm a-goin'."

Ma measured coffee into the water. “Rosasharn, you wasn’t to the pancakes las’ night.” The girl didn’t answer. “What you wanta pick cotton for?” Still no answer. “Is it ’cause of Al an’ Aggie?” This time Ma looked closely at her daughter. “Oh. Well, you don’ need to pick.”

“I’m goin’.”

“Awright, but don’ you strain yourself.”

“Git up, Pa! Wake up, git up!”

Pa blinked and yawned. “Ain’t slep’ out,” he moaned. “Musta been on to eleven o’clock when we went down.”

“Come on, git up, all a you, an’ wash.”

The inhabitants of the car came slowly to life, squirmed up out of the blankets, writhed into their clothes. Ma sliced salt pork into her second frying pan. “Git out an’ wash,” she commanded.

A light sprang up in the other end of the car. And there came the sound of the breaking of twigs from the Wainwright end. “Mis’ Joad,” came the call. “We’re gettin’ ready. We’ll be ready.”

Al grumbled, “What we got to be up so early for?”

“It’s on’y twenty acres,” Ma said. “Got to get there. Ain’t much cotton lef ’. Got to be there ’fore she’s picked.” Ma rushed them dressed, rushed the breakfast into them. “Come on, drink your coffee,” she said. “Got to start.”

“We can’t pick no cotton in the dark, Ma.”

“We can *be* there when it gets light.”

“Maybe it’s wet.”

“Didn’ rain enough. Come on now, drink your coffee. Al, soon’s you’re through, better get the engine runnin’.”

She called, “You near ready, Mis’ Wainwright?”

“Jus’ eatin’. Be ready in a minute.”

Outside, the camp had come to life. Fires burned in front of the tents. The stovepipes from the boxcars spurted smoke.

Al tipped up his coffee and got a mouthful of grounds. He went down the cat-walk spitting them out.

“We’re awready, Mis’ Wainwright,” Ma called. She turned to Rose of Sharon. She said, “You got to stay.”

The girl set her jaw. “I’m a-goin’,” she said. “Ma, I got to go.”

“Well, you got no cotton sack. You can’t pull no sack.”

“I’ll pick into your sack.”

“I wisht you wouldn’.”

“I’m a-goin’.”

Ma sighed. “I’ll keep my eye on you. Wisht we could have a doctor.” Rose of Sharon moved nervously about the car. She put on a light coat and took it off. “Take a blanket,” Ma said. “Then if you wanta res’, you can keep warm.” They heard the truck motor roar up behind the boxcar. “We gonna be first out,” Ma said exultantly. “Awright, get your sacks. Ruthie, don’ you forget them shirts I fixed for you to pick in.”

Wainwrights and Joads climbed into the truck in the dark. The dawn was coming, but it was slow and pale.

“Turn lef’,” Ma told Al. “They’ll be a sign out where we’re goin’.” They drove along the dark road. And other cars followed them, and behind, in the camp, the cars were being started, the families piling in; and the cars pulled out on the highway and turned left.

A piece of cardboard was tied to a mailbox on the righthand side of the road, and on it, printed with blue crayon, “Cotton Pickers Wanted.” Al turned into the entrance and drove out to the barnyard. And the barnyard was full of cars already. An electric globe on the end of the white barn lighted a group of men and women standing near the scales, their bags rolled under their arms. Some of the women wore the bags over their shoulders and crossed in front.

“We ain’t so early as we thought,” said Al. He pulled the truck against a fence and parked. The families climbed down and went to join the waiting group, and more cars came in from the road and parked, and more families joined the group. Under the light on the barn end, the owner signed them in.

“Hawley?” he said. “H-a-w-l-e-y? How many?”

“Four. Will——”

“Will.”

“Benton——”

“Benton.”

“Amelia——”

“Amelia.”

“Claire——”

“Claire. Who’s next? Carpenter? How many?”

“Six.”

He wrote them in the book, with a space left for the weights. “Got your bags? I got a few. Cost you a dollar.” And the cars poured into the yard. The owner pulled his sheep-lined leather jacket up around his throat. He looked at the driveway apprehensively. “This twenty isn’t gonna take long to pick with all these people,” he said.

Children were climbing into the big cotton trailer, digging their toes into the chicken-wire sides. “Git off there,” the owner cried. “Come on down. You’ll tear that wire loose.” And the children climbed slowly down, embarrassed and silent. The gray dawn came. “I’ll have to take a tare for dew,” the owner said. “Change it when the sun comes out. All right, go out when you want. Light enough to see.”

The people moved quickly out into the cotton field and took their rows. They tied the bags to their waists and they slapped their hands together to warm stiff fingers that had to be nimble. The dawn colored over the eastern hills, and the wide line moved over the rows. And from the highway the cars still moved in and parked in the barnyard until it was full, and they parked along the road on both sides. The wind blew briskly across the field. “I don’t know how you all found out,” the owner said. “There must be a hell of a grapevine. The twenty won’t last till noon. What name? Hume? How many?”

The line of people moved out across the field, and the strong steady west wind blew their clothes. Their fingers flew to the spilling bolls, and flew to the long sacks growing heavy behind them.

Pa spoke to the man in the row to his right. “Back home we might get rain out of a wind like this. Seems a little mite frosty for rain. How long you been out here?” He kept his eyes down on his work as he spoke.

His neighbor didn’t look up. “I been here nearly a year.”

“Would you say it was gonna rain?”

“Can’t tell, an’ that ain’t no insult, neither. Folks that lived here all their life can’t tell. If the rain can git in the way of a crop, it’ll rain. Tha’s what they say out here.”

Pa looked quickly at the western hills. Big gray clouds were

coasting over the ridge, riding the wind swiftly. “Them looks like rain-heads,” he said.

His neighbor stole a squinting look. “Can’t tell,” he said. And all down the line of rows the people looked back at the clouds. And then they bent lower to their work, and their hands flew to the cotton. They raced at the picking, raced against time and cotton weight, raced against the rain and against each other—only so much cotton to pick, only so much money to be made. They came to the other side of the field and ran to get a new row. And now they faced into the wind, and they could see the high gray clouds moving over the sky toward the rising sun. And more cars parked along the roadside, and new pickers came to be checked in. The line of people moved frantically across the field, weighed at the end, marked their cotton, checked the weights into their own books, and ran for new rows.

At eleven o’clock the field was picked and the work was done. The wire-sided trailers were hooked on behind wire-sided trucks, and they moved out to the highway and drove away to the gin. The cotton fluffed out through the chicken wire and little clouds of cotton blew through the air, and rags of cotton caught and waved on the weeds beside the road. The pickers clustered disconsolately back to the barnyard and stood in line to be paid off.

“Hume, James. Twenty-two cents. Ralph, thirty cents. Joad, Thomas, ninety cents. Winfield, fifteen cents.” The money lay in rolls, silver and nickels and pennies. And each man looked in his own book as he was being paid. “Wainwright, Agnes, thirty-four cents. Tobin, sixty-three cents.” The line moved past slowly. The families went back to their cars, silently. And they drove slowly away.

Joads and Wainwrights waited in the truck for the driveway to clear. And as they waited, the first drops of rain began to fall. Al put his hand out of the cab to feel them. Rose of Sharon sat in the middle, and Ma on the outside. The girl’s eyes were lusterless again.

“You shouldn’ of came,” Ma said. “You didn’ pick more’n ten-fifteen pounds.” Rose of Sharon looked down at her great bulging belly, and she didn’t reply. She shivered suddenly and held her head high. Ma, watching her closely, unrolled her cotton bag, spread it over Rose of Sharon’s shoulders, and drew her close.

At last the way was clear. Al started his motor and drove out into

the highway. The big infrequent drops of rain lanced down and splashed on the road, and as the truck moved along, the drops became smaller and closer. Rain pounded on the cab of the truck so loudly that it could be heard over the pounding of the old worn motor. On the truck bed the Wainwrights and Joads spread their cotton bags over their heads and shoulders.

Rose of Sharon shivered violently against Ma's arm, and Ma cried, "Go faster, Al. Rosasharn got a chill. Gotta get her feet in hot water."

Al speeded the pounding motor, and when he came to the boxcar camp, he drove down close to the red cars. Ma was spouting orders before they were well stopped. "Al," she commanded, "you an' John an' Pa go into the willows an' c'lect all the dead stuff you can. We got to keep warm."

"Wonder if the roof leaks."

"No, I don' think so. Be nice an' dry, but we got to have wood. Got to keep warm. Take Ruthie an' Winfiel' too. They can get twigs. This here girl ain't well." Ma got out, and Rose of Sharon tried to follow, but her knees buckled and she sat down heavily on the running board.

Fat Mrs. Wainwright saw her. "What's a matter? Her time come?"

"No, I don' think so," said Ma. "Got a chill. Maybe took col'. Gimme a han', will you?" The two women supported Rose of Sharon. After a few steps her strength came back—her legs took her weight.

"I'm awright, Ma," she said. "It was jus' a minute there."

The older women kept hands on her elbows. "Feet in hot water," Ma said wisely. They helped her up the cat-walk and into the boxcar.

"You rub her," Mrs. Wainwright said. "I'll get a far' goin'." She used the last of the twigs and built up a blaze in the stove. The rain poured now, scoured at the roof of the car.

Ma looked up at it. "Thank God we got a tight roof," she said. "Them tents leaks, no matter how good. Jus' put on a little water, Mis' Wainwright."

Rose of Sharon lay still on a mattress. She let them take off her shoes and rub her feet. Mrs. Wainwright bent over her. "You got pain?" she demanded.

“No. Jus’ don’ feel good. Jus’ feel bad.”

“I got pain killer an’ salts,” Mrs. Wainwright said. “You’re welcome to ’em if you want ’em. Perfec’ly welcome.”

The girl shivered violently. “Cover me up, Ma. I’m col’.” Ma brought all the blankets and piled them on top of her. The rain roared down on the roof.

Now the wood-gatherers returned, their arms piled high with sticks and their hats and coats dripping. “Jesus, she’s wet,” Pa said. “Soaks you in a minute.”

Ma said, “Better go back an’ get more. Burns up awful quick. Be dark purty soon.” Ruthie and Winfield dripped in and threw their sticks on the pile. They turned to go again. “You stay,” Ma ordered. “Stan’ up close to the fire an’ get dry.”

The afternoon was silver with rain, the roads glittered with water. Hour by hour the cotton plants seemed to blacken and shrivel. Pa and Al and Uncle John made trip after trip into the thickets and brought back loads of dead wood. They piled it near the door, until the heap of it nearly reached the ceiling, and at last they stopped and walked toward the stove. Streams of water ran from their hats to their shoulders. The edges of their coats dripped and their shoes squished as they walked.

“Awright, now, get off them clothes,” Ma said. “I got some nice coffee for you fellas. An’ you got dry overhalls to put on. Don’ stan’ there.”

The evening came early. In the boxcars the families huddled together, listening to the pouring water on the roofs.

Chapter 29

Over the high coast mountains and over the valleys the gray clouds marched in from the ocean. The wind blew fiercely and silently, high in the air, and it swished in the brush, and it roared in the forests. The clouds came in brokenly, in puffs, in folds, in gray crags; and they piled in together and settled low over the west. And then the wind stopped and left the clouds deep and solid. The rain began with gusty showers, pauses and downpours; and then gradually it settled to a single tempo, small drops and a steady beat, rain that was gray to see through, rain that cut midday light to evening. And at first the dry earth sucked the moisture down and blackened. For two days the earth drank the rain, until the earth was full. Then puddles formed, and in the low places little lakes formed in the fields. The muddy lakes rose higher, and the steady rain whipped the shining water. At last the mountains were full, and the hillsides spilled into the streams, built them to freshets, and sent them roaring down the canyons into the valleys. The rain beat on steadily. And the streams and the little rivers edged up to the bank sides and worked at willows and tree roots, bent the willows deep in the current, cut out the roots of cottonwoods and brought down the trees. The muddy water whirled along the bank sides and crept up the banks until at last it spilled over, into the fields, into the orchards, into the cotton patches where the black stems stood. Level fields became lakes, broad and gray, and the rain whipped up the surfaces. Then the water poured over the highways, and cars moved slowly, cutting the water ahead, and leaving a boiling muddy wake behind. The earth whispered under the beat of the rain, and the streams thundered under the churning freshets.

When the first rain started, the migrant people huddled in their tents, saying, It'll soon be over, and asking, How long's it likely to go on?

And when the puddles formed, the men went out in the rain with shovels and built little dikes around the tents. The beating rain worked at the canvas until it penetrated and sent streams down. And then the little dikes washed out and the water came inside, and the streams wet the beds and the blankets. The people sat in wet clothes. They set up boxes and put planks on the boxes. Then, day

and night, they sat on the planks.

Beside the tents the old cars stood, and water fouled the ignition wires and water fouled the carburetors. The little gray tents stood in lakes. And at last the people had to move. Then the cars wouldn't start because the wires were shorted; and if the engines would run, deep mud engulfed the wheels. And the people waded away, carrying their wet blankets in their arms. They splashed along, carrying the children, carrying the very old, in their arms. And if a barn stood on high ground, it was filled with people, shivering and hopeless.

Then some went to the relief offices, and they came sadly back to their own people.

They's rules—you got to be here a year before you can git relief. They say the gov'ment is gonna help. They don' know when.

And gradually the greatest terror of all came along.

They ain't gonna be no kinda work for three months.

In the barns, the people sat huddled together; and the terror came over them, and their faces were gray with terror. The children cried with hunger, and there was no food.

Then the sickness came, pneumonia, and measles that went to the eyes and to the mastoids.

And the rain fell steadily, and the water flowed over the highways, for the culverts could not carry the water.

Then from the tents, from the crowded barns, groups of sodden men went out, their clothes slopping rags, their shoes muddy pulp. They splashed out through the water, to the towns, to the country stores, to the relief offices, to beg for food, to cringe and beg for food, to beg for relief, to try to steal, to lie. And under the begging, and under the cringing, a hopeless anger began to smolder. And in the little towns pity for the sodden men changed to anger, and anger at the hungry people changed to fear of them. Then sheriffs swore in deputies in droves, and orders were rushed for rifles, for tear gas, for ammunition. Then the hungry men crowded the alleys behind the stores to beg for bread, to beg for rotting vegetables, to steal when they could.

Frantic men pounded on the doors of the doctors; and the doctors were busy. And sad men left word at country stores for the coroner to send a car. The coroners were not too busy. The coroners'

wagons backed up through the mud and took out the dead.

And the rain pattered relentlessly down, and the streams broke their banks and spread out over the country.

Huddled under sheds, lying in wet hay, the hunger and the fear bred anger. Then boys went out, not to beg, but to steal; and men went out weakly, to try to steal.

The sheriffs swore in new deputies and ordered new rifles; and the comfortable people in tight houses felt pity at first, and then distaste, and finally hatred for the migrant people.

In the wet hay of leaking barns babies were born to women who panted with pneumonia. And old people curled up in corners and died that way, so that the coroners could not straighten them. At night the frantic men walked boldly to hen roosts and carried off the squawking chickens. If they were shot at, they did not run, but splashed sullenly away; and if they were hit, they sank tiredly in the mud.

The rain stopped. On the fields the water stood, reflecting the gray sky, and the land whispered with moving water. And the men came out of the barns, out of the sheds. They squatted on their hams and looked out over the flooded land. And they were silent. And sometimes they talked very quietly.

No work till spring. No work.

And if no work—no money, no food.

Fella had a team of horses, had to use 'em to plow an' cultivate an' mow, wouldn' think a turnin' 'em out to starve when they wasn't workin'.

Them's horses—we're men.

The women watched the men, watched to see whether the break had come at last. The women stood silently and watched. And where a number of men gathered together, the fear went from their faces, and anger took its place. And the women sighed with relief, for they knew it was all right—the break had not come; and the break would never come as long as fear could turn to wrath.

Tiny points of grass came through the earth, and in a few days the hills were pale green with the beginning year.

Chapter 30

In the boxcar camp the water stood in puddles, and the rain splashed in the mud. Gradually the little stream crept up the bank toward the low flat where the boxcars stood.

On the second day of the rain Al took the tarpaulin down from the middle of the car. He carried it out and spread it on the nose of the truck, and he came back into the car and sat down on his mattress. Now, without the separation, the two families in the car were one. The men sat together, and their spirits were damp. Ma kept a little fire going in the stove, kept a few twigs burning, and she conserved her wood. The rain poured down on the nearly flat roof of the boxcar.

On the third day the Wainwrights grew restless. “Maybe we better go ’long,” Mrs. Wainwright said.

And Ma tried to keep them. “Where’d you go an’ be sure of a tight roof ?”

“I dunno, but I got a feelin’ we oughta go along.” They argued together, and Ma watched Al.

Ruthie and Winfield tried to play for a while, and then they too relapsed into sullen inactivity, and the rain drummed down on the roof.

On the third day the sound of the stream could be heard above the drumming rain. Pa and Uncle John stood in the open door and looked out on the rising stream. At both ends of the camp the water ran near to the highway, but at the camp it looped away so that the highway embankment surrounded the camp at the back and the stream closed it in on the front. And Pa said, “How’s it look to you, John? Seems to me if that crick comes up, she’ll flood us.”

Uncle John opened his mouth and rubbed his bristling chin. “Yeah,” he said. “Might at that.”

Rose of Sharon was down with a heavy cold, her face flushed and her eyes shining with fever. Ma sat beside her with a cup of hot milk. “Here,” she said. “Take this here. Got bacon grease in it for strength. Here, drink it!”

Rose of Sharon shook her head weakly. “I ain’t hungry.”

Pa drew a curved line in the air with his finger. “If we was all to

get our shovels an' throw up a bank, I bet we could keep her out. On'y have to go from up there down to there."

"Yeah," Uncle John agreed. "Might. Dunno if them other fellas'd wanta. They'd maybe ruther move somewheres else."

"But these here cars is dry," Pa insisted. "Couldn'find no dry place as good as this. You wait." From the pile of brush in the car he picked a twig. He ran down the cat-walk, splashed through the mud to the stream and he set his twig upright on the edge of the swirling water. In a moment he was back in the car. "Jesus, ya get wet through," he said.

Both men kept their eyes on the little twig on the water's edge. They saw the water move slowly up around it and creep up the bank. Pa squatted down in the doorway. "Comin' up fast," he said. "I think we oughta go talk to the other fellas. See if they'll help ditch up. Got to git outa here if they won't." Pa looked down the long car to the Wainwright end. Al was with them, sitting beside Aggie. Pa walked into their precinct. "Water's risin'," he said. "How about if we throwed up a bank? We could do her if ever'body helped."

Wainwright said, "We was jes' talkin'. Seems like we oughta be gettin' outa here."

Pa said, "You been aroun'. You know what chancet we got a gettin' a dry place to stay."

"I know. But jes' the same——"

Al said, "Pa, if they go, I'm a-goin' too."

Pa looked startled. "You can't, Al. The truck—We ain't fit to drive that truck."

"I don' care. Me an' Aggie got to stick together."

"Now you wait," Pa said. "Come on over here." Wainwright and Al got to their feet and approached the door. "See?" Pa said, pointing. "Jus' a bank from there an' down to there." He looked at his stick. The water swirled about it now, and crept up the bank.

"Be a lot a work, an' then she might come over anyways," Wainwright protested.

"Well, we ain't doin' nothin', might's well be workin'. We ain't gonna find us no nice place to live like this. Come on, now. Le's go talk to the other fellas. We can do her if ever'body helps."

Al said, "If Aggie goes, I'm a-goin' too."

Pa said, “Look, Al, if them fellas won’t dig, then we’ll all hafta go. Come on, le’s go talk to ’em.” They hunched their shoulders and ran down the cat-walk to the next car and up the walk into its open door.

Ma was at the stove, feeding a few sticks to the feeble flame. Ruthie crowded close beside her. “I’m hungry,” Ruthie whined.

“No, you ain’t,” Ma said. “You had good mush.”

“Wisht I had a box a Cracker Jack. There ain’t nothin’ to do. Ain’t no fun.”

“They’ll be fun,” Ma said. “You jus’ wait. Be fun purty soon. Git a house an’ a place, purty soon.”

“Wisht we had a dog,” Ruthie said.

“We’ll have a dog; have a cat, too.”

“Yella cat?”

“Don’t bother me,” Ma begged. “Don’t go plaguin’ me now, Ruthie. Rosasharn’s sick. Jus’ you be a good girl a little while. They’ll be fun.” Ruthie wandered, complaining, away.

From the mattress where Rose of Sharon lay covered up there came a quick sharp cry, cut off in the middle. Ma whirled and went to her. Rose of Sharon was holding her breath and her eyes were filled with terror.

“What is it?” Ma cried. The girl expelled her breath and caught it again. Suddenly Ma put her hand under the covers. Then she stood up. “Mis’ Wainwright,” she called. “Oh, Mis’ Wainwright!”

The fat little woman came down the car. “Want me?”

“Look!” Ma pointed at Rose of Sharon’s face. Her teeth were clamped on her lower lip and her forehead was wet with perspiration, and the shining terror was in her eyes.

“I think it’s come,” Ma said. “It’s early.”

The girl heaved a great sigh and relaxed. She released her lip and closed her eyes. Mrs. Wainwright bent over her.

“Did it kinda grab you all over—quick? Open up an’ answer me.” Rose of Sharon nodded weakly. Mrs. Wainwright turned to Ma. “Yep,” she said. “It’s come. Early, ya say?”

“Maybe the fever brang it.”

“Well, she oughta be up on her feet. Oughta be walkin’ aroun’.”

“She can’t,” Ma said. “She ain’t got the strength.”

“Well, she oughta.” Mrs. Wainwright grew quiet and stern with efficiency. “I he’ped with lots,” she said. “Come on, le’s close that door, nearly. Keep out the draf’” The two women pushed on the heavy sliding door, boosted it along until only a foot was open. “I’ll git our lamp, too,” Mrs. Wainwright said. Her face was purple with excitement. “Aggie,” she called. “You take care of these here little fellas.”

Ma nodded, “Tha’s right. Ruthie! You an’ Winfiel’ go down with Aggie. Go on now.”

“Why?” they demanded.

“’Cause you got to. Rosasharn gonna have her baby.”

“I wanta watch, Ma. Please let me.”

“Ruthie! You git now. You git quick.” There was no argument against such a tone. Ruthie and Winfield went reluctantly down the car. Ma lighted the lantern. Mrs. Wainwright brought her Rochester lamp down and set it on the floor, and its big circular flame lighted the boxcar brightly.

Ruthie and Winfield stood behind the brush pile and peered over. “Gonna have a baby, an’ we’re a-gonna see,” Ruthie said softly. “Don’t you make no noise now. Ma won’t let us watch. If she looks this-a-way, you scrunch down behin’ the brush. Then we’ll see.”

“There ain’t many kids seen it,” Winfield said.

“There ain’t no kids seen it,” Ruthie insisted proudly. “On’y us.”

Down by the mattress, in the bright light of the lamp, Ma and Mrs. Wainwright held conference. Their voices were raised a little over the hollow beating of the rain. Mrs. Wainwright took a paring knife from her apron pocket and slipped it under the mattress. “Maybe it don’t do no good,” she said apologetically. “Our folks always done it. Don’t do no harm, anyways.”

Ma nodded. “We used a plow point. I guess anything sharp’ll work, long as it can cut birth pains. I hope it ain’t gonna be a long one.”

“You feelin’ awright now?”

Rose of Sharon nodded nervously. “Is it a-comin’?”

“Sure,” Ma said. “Gonna have a nice baby. You jus’ got to help us. Feel like you could get up an’ walk?”

"I can try."

"That's a good girl," Mrs. Wainwright said. "That *is* a good girl. We'll he'p you, honey. We'll walk with ya." They helped her to her feet and pinned a blanket over her shoulders. Then Ma held her arm from one side, and Mrs. Wainwright from the other. They walked her to the brush pile and turned slowly and walked her back, over and over; and the rain drummed deeply on the roof.

Ruthie and Winfield watched anxiously. "When's she goin' to have it?" he demanded.

"Sh! Don't draw 'em. We won't be let to look."

Aggie joined them behind the brush pile. Aggie's lean face and yellow hair showed in the lamplight, and her nose was long and sharp in the shadow of her head on the wall.

Ruthie whispered, "You ever saw a baby bore?"

"Sure," said Aggie.

"Well, when's she gonna have it?"

"Oh, not for a long, long time."

"Well, how long?"

"Maybe not 'fore tomorrow mornin'."

"Shucks!" said Ruthie. "Ain't no good watchin' now, then. Oh! Look!"

The walking women had stopped. Rose of Sharon had stiffened, and she whined with pain. They laid her down on the mattress and wiped her forehead while she grunted and clenched her fists. And Ma talked softly to her. "Easy," Ma said. "Gonna be all right—all right. Jus' grip ya han's. Now, then, take your lip inta your teeth. Tha's good—tha's good." The pain passed on. They let her rest awhile, and then helped her up again, and the three walked back and forth, back and forth between the pains.

Pa stuck his head in through the narrow opening. His hat dripped with water. "What ya shut the door for?" he asked. And then he saw the walking women.

Ma said, "Her time's come."

"Then—then we couldn' go 'f we wanted to."

"No."

"Then we got to buil' that bank."

"You got to."

Pa sloshed through the mud to the stream. His marking stick was four inches down. Twenty men stood in the rain. Pa cried, “We got to build her. My girl got her pains.” The men gathered about him.

“Baby?”

“Yeah. We can’t go now.”

A tall man said, “It ain’t our baby. We kin go.”

“Sure,” Pa said. “You can go. Go on. Nobody’s stoppin’ you. They’s only eight shovels.” He hurried to the lowest part of the bank and drove his shovel into the mud. The shovelful lifted with a sucking sound. He drove it again, and threw the mud into the low place on the stream bank. And beside him the other men ranged themselves. They heaped the mud up in a long embankment, and those who had no shovels cut live willow whips and wove them in a mat and kicked them into the bank. Over the men came a fury of work, a fury of battle. When one man dropped his shovel, another took it up. They had shed their coats and hats. Their shirts and trousers clung tightly to their bodies, their shoes were shapeless blobs of mud. A shrill scream came from the Joad car. The men stopped, listened uneasily, and then plunged to work again. And the little levee of earth extended until it connected with the highway embankment on either end. They were tired now, and the shovels moved more slowly. And the stream rose slowly. It edged above the place where the first dirt had been thrown.

Pa laughed in triumph. “She’d come over if we hadn’ a built up!” he cried.

The stream rose slowly up the side of the new wall, and tore at the willow mat. “Higher!” Pa cried. “We got to git her higher!”

The evening came, and the work went on. And now the men were beyond weariness. Their faces were set and dead. They worked jerkily, like machines. When it was dark the women set lanterns in the car doors, and kept pots of coffee handy. And the women ran one by one to the Joad car and wedged themselves inside.

The pains were coming close now, twenty minutes apart. And Rose of Sharon had lost her restraint. She screamed fiercely under the fierce pains. And the neighbor women looked at her and patted her gently and went back to their own cars.

Ma had a good fire going now, and all her utensils, filled with water, sat on the stove to heat. Every little while Pa looked in the

car door. “All right?” he asked.

“Yeah! I think so,” Ma assured him.

As it grew dark, someone brought out a flashlight to work by. Uncle John plunged on, throwing mud on top of the wall.

“You take it easy,” Pa said. “You’ll kill yaself.”

“I can’the’p it. I can’t stan’ that yellin’. It’s like—it’s like when ——”

“I know,” Pa said. “But jus’ take it easy.”

Uncle John blubbered, “I’ll run away. By God, I got to work or I’ll run away.”

Pa turned from him. “How’s she stan’ on the last marker?”

The man with the flashlight threw the beam on the stick. The rain cut whitely through the light. “Comin’ up.”

“She’ll come up slower now,” Pa said. “Got to flood purty far on the other side.”

“She’s comin’ up, though.”

The women filled the coffee pots and set them out again. And as the night went on, the men moved slower and slower, and they lifted their heavy feet like draft horses. More mud on the levee, more willows interlaced. The rain fell steadily. When the flashlight turned on faces, the eyes showed staring, and the muscles on the cheeks were welted out.

For a long time the screams continued from the car, and at last they were still.

Pa said, “Ma’d call me if it was bore.” He went on shoveling the mud sullenly.

The stream eddied and boiled against the bank. Then, from up the stream there came a ripping crash. The beam of the flashlight showed a great cottonwood toppling. The men stopped to watch. The branches of the tree sank into the water and edged around with the current while the stream dug out the little roots. Slowly the tree was freed, and slowly it edged down the stream. The weary men watched, their mouths hanging open. The tree moved slowly down. Then a branch caught on a stump, snagged and held. And very slowly the roots swung around and hooked themselves on the new embankment. The water piled up behind. The tree moved and tore the bank. A little stream slipped through. Pa threw himself forward and jammed mud in the break. The water piled against the tree.

And then the bank washed quickly down, washed around ankles, around knees. The men broke and ran, and the current worked smoothly into the flat, under the cars, under the automobiles.

Uncle John saw the water break through. In the murk he could see it. Uncontrollably his weight pulled him down. He went to his knees, and the tugging water swirled about his chest.

Pa saw him go. “Hey! What’s the matter?” He lifted him to his feet. “You sick? Come on, the cars is high.”

Uncle John gathered his strength. “I dunno,” he said apologetically. “Legs give out. Jus’ give out.” Pa helped him along toward the cars.

When the dike swept out, Al turned and ran. His feet moved heavily. The water was about his calves when he reached the truck. He flung the tarpaulin off the nose and jumped into the car. He stepped on the starter. The engine turned over and over, and there was no bark of the motor. He choked the engine deeply. The battery turned the sodden motor more and more slowly, and there was no cough. Over and over, slower and slower. Al set the spark high. He felt under the seat for the crank and jumped out. The water was higher than the running board. He ran to the front end. Crank case was under water now. Frantically he fitted the crank and twisted around and around, and his clenched hand on the crank splashed in the slowly flowing water at each turn. At last his frenzy gave out. The motor was full of water, the battery fouled by now. On slightly higher ground two cars were started and their lights on. They floundered in the mud and dug their wheels down until finally the drivers cut off the motors and sat still, looking into the headlight beams. And the rain whipped white streaks through the lights. Al went slowly around the truck, reached in, and turned off the ignition.

When Pa reached the cat-walk, he found the lower end floating. He stepped it down into the mud, under water. “Think ya can make it awright, John?” he asked.

“I’ll be awright. Jus’ go on.”

Pa cautiously climbed the cat-walk and squeezed himself in the narrow opening. The two lamps were turned low. Ma sat on the mattress beside Rose of Sharon, and Ma fanned her still face with a piece of cardboard. Mrs. Wainwright poked dry brush into the stove, and a dank smoke edged out around the lids and filled the

car with a smell of burning tissue. Ma looked up at Pa when he entered, and then quickly down.

"How—is she?" Pa asked.

Ma did not look up at him again. "Awright, I think. Sleepin'."

The air was fetid and close with the smell of the birth. Uncle John clambered in and held himself upright against the side of the car. Mrs. Wainwright left her work and came to Pa. She pulled him by the elbow toward the corner of the car. She picked up a lantern and held it over an apple box in the corner. On a newspaper lay a blue shriveled little mummy.

"Never breathed," said Mrs. Wainwright softly. "Never was alive."

Uncle John turned and shuffled tiredly down the car to the dark end. The rain whished softly on the roof now, so softly that they could hear Uncle John's tired sniffling from the dark.

Pa looked up at Mrs. Wainwright. He took the lantern from her hand and put it on the floor. Ruthie and Winfield were asleep on their own mattress, their arms over their eyes to cut out the light.

Pa walked slowly to Rose of Sharon's mattress. He tried to squat down, but his legs were too tired. He knelt instead. Ma fanned her square of cardboard back and forth. She looked at Pa for a moment, and her eyes were wide and staring, like a sleepwalker's eyes.

Pa said, "We—done—what we could."

"I know."

"We worked all night. An' a tree cut out the bank."

"I know."

"You can hear it under the car."

"I know. I heard it."

"Think she's gonna be all right?"

"I dunno."

"Well—couldn' we—of did nothin'?"

Ma's lips were stiff and white. "No. They was on'y one thing to do—ever—an' we done it."

"We worked till we dropped, an' a tree—Rain's lettin' up some." Ma looked at the ceiling, and then down again. Pa went on, compelled to talk. "I dunno how high she'll rise. Might flood the car."

"I know."

“You know ever’thing.”

She was silent, and the cardboard moved slowly back and forth.

“Did we slip up?” he pleaded. “Is they anything we could of did?”

Ma looked at him strangely. Her white lips smiled in a dreaming compassion. “Don’t take no blame. Hush! It’ll be awright. They’s changes—all over.”

“Maybe the water—maybe we’ll have to go.”

“When it’s time to go—we’ll go. We’ll do what we got to do. Now hush. You might wake her.”

Mrs. Wainwright broke twigs and poked them in the sodden, smoking fire.

From outside came the sound of an angry voice. “I’m goin’ in an’ see the son-of-a-bitch myself.”

And then, just outside the door, Al’s voice, “Where you think you’re goin’?”

“Goin’ in to see that bastard Joad.”

“No, you ain’t. What’s the matter’th you?”

“If he didn’t have that fool idear about the bank, we’d a got out. Now our car is dead.”

“You think ours is burnin’ up the road?”

“I’m a-goin’ in.”

Al’s voice was cold. “You’re gonna fight your way in.”

Pa got slowly to his feet and went to the door. “Awright, Al. I’m comin’ out. It’s awright, Al.” Pa slid down the catwalk. Ma heard him say, “We got sickness. Come on down here.”

The rain scattered lightly on the roof now, and a new-risen breeze blew it along in sweeps. Mrs. Wainwright came from the stove and looked down at Rose of Sharon. “Dawn’s a-comin’ soon, ma’am. Whyn’t you git some sleep? I’ll set with her.”

“No,” Ma said. “I ain’t tar’d.”

“In a pig’s eye,” said Mrs. Wainwright. “Come on, you lay down awhile.”

Ma fanned the air slowly with her cardboard. “You been frien’ly,” she said. “We thank you.”

The stout woman smiled. “No need to thank. Ever’body’s in the same wagon. S’pose we was down. You’d a give us a han’.”

“Yes,” Ma said, “we would.”

“Or anybody.”

“Or anybody. Use’ ta be the fambly was fust. It ain’t so now. It’s anybody. Worse off we get, the more we got to do.”

“We couldn’ a saved it.”

“I know,” said Ma.

Ruthie sighed deeply and took her arm from over her eyes. She looked blindly at the lamp for a moment, and then turned her head and looked at Ma. “Is it bore?” she demanded. “Is the baby out?”

Mrs. Wainwright picked up a sack and spread it over the apple box in the corner.

“Where’s the baby?” Ruthie demanded.

Ma wet her lips. “They ain’t no baby. They never was no baby. We was wrong.”

“Shucks!” Ruthie yawned. “I wisht it had a been a baby.”

Mrs. Wainwright sat down beside Ma and took the cardboard from her and fanned the air. Ma folded her hands in her lap, and her tired eyes never left the face of Rose of Sharon, sleeping in exhaustion. “Come on,” Mrs. Wainwright said. “Jus’ lay down. You’ll be right beside her. Why, you’d wake up if she took a deep breath, even.”

“Awright, I will.” Ma stretched out on the mattress beside the sleeping girl. And Mrs. Wainwright sat on the floor and kept watch.

Pa and Al and Uncle John sat in the car doorway and watched the steely dawn come. The rain had stopped, but the sky was deep and solid with cloud. As the light came, it was reflected on the water. The men could see the current of the stream, slipping swiftly down, bearing black branches of trees, boxes, boards. The water swirled into the flat where the boxcars stood. There was no sign of the embankment left. On the flat the current stopped. The edges of the flood were lined with yellow foam. Pa leaned out the door and placed a twig on the cat-walk, just above the water line. The men watched the water slowly climb to it, lift it gently and float it away. Pa placed another twig an inch above the water and settled back to watch.

“Think it’ll come inside the car?” Al asked.

“Can’t tell. They’s a hell of a lot of water got to come down from the hills yet. Can’t tell. Might start up to rain again.”

Al said, “I been a-thinkin’. If she come in, ever’thing’ll get soaked.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, she won’t come up more’n three-four feet in the car ’cause she’ll go over the highway an’ spread out first.”

“How you know?” Pa asked.

“I took a sight on her, off the end of the car.” He held his hand. “’Bout this far up she’ll come.”

“Awright,” Pa said. “What about it? We won’t be here.”

“We got to be here. Truck’s here. Take a week to get the water out of her when the flood goes down.”

“Well—what’s your idear?”

“We can tear out the side-boards of the truck an’ build a kinda platform in here to pile our stuff ’an to set up on.”

“Yeah? How’ll we cook—how’ll we eat?”

“Well, it’ll keep our stuff dry.”

The light grew stronger outside, a gray metallic light. The second little stick floated away from the cat-walk. Pa placed another one higher up. “Sure climbin’,” he said. “I guess we better do that.”

Ma turned restlessly in her sleep. Her eyes started wide open. She cried sharply in warning, “Tom! Oh, Tom! Tom!”

Mrs. Wainwright spoke soothingly. The eyes flicked closed again and Ma squirmed under her dream. Mrs. Wainwright got up and walked to the doorway. “Hey!” she said softly. “We ain’t gonna git out soon.” She pointed to the corner of the car where the apple box was. “That ain’t doin’ no good. Jus’ cause trouble an’ sorra. Couldn’ you fellas kinda—take it out an’ bury it?”

The men were silent. Pa said at last, “Guess you’re right. Jus’ cause sorra. ’Gainst the law to bury it.”

“They’s lots a things ’gainst the law that we can’the’p doin’.”

“Yeah.”

Al said, “We oughta git them truck sides tore off ’fore the water comes up much more.”

Pa turned to Uncle John. “Will you take an’ bury it while Al an me git that lumber in?”

Uncle John said sullenly, “Why do I got to do it? Why don’t you fellas? I don’ like it.” And then, “Sure. I’ll do it. Sure, I will. Come

on, give it to me." His voice began to rise. "Come on! Give it to me."

"Don' wake 'em up," Mrs. Wainwright said. She brought the apple box to the doorway and straightened the sack decently over it.

"Shovel's standin' right behin' you," Pa said.

Uncle John took the shovel in one hand. He slipped out the doorway into the slowly moving water, and it rose nearly to his waist before he struck bottom. He turned and settled the apple box under his other arm.

Pa said, "Come on, Al. Le's git that lumber in."

In the gray dawn light Uncle John waded around the end of the car, past the Joad truck; and he climbed the slippery bank to the highway. He walked down the highway, past the boxcar flat, until he came to a place where the boiling stream ran close to the road, where the willows grew along the road side. He put his shovel down, and holding the box in front of him, he edged through the brush until he came to the edge of the swift stream. For a time he stood watching it swirl by, leaving its yellow foam among the willow stems. He held the apple box against his chest. And then he leaned over and set the box in the stream and steadied it with his hand. He said fiercely, "Go down an' tell 'em. Go down in the street an' rot an' tell 'em that way. That's the way you can talk. Don' even know if you was a boy or a girl. Ain't gonna find out. Go on down now, an' lay in the street. Maybe they'll know then." He guided the box gently out into the current and let it go. It settled low in the water, edged sideways, whirled around, and turned slowly over. The sack floated away, and the box, caught in the swift water, floated quickly away, out of sight, behind the brush. Uncle John grabbed the shovel and went rapidly back to the boxcars. He sloshed down into the water and waded to the truck, where Pa and Al were working, taking down the one-by-six planks.

Pa looked over at him. "Get it done?"

"Yeah."

"Well, look," Pa said. "If you'll he'p Al, I'll go down the store an' get some stuff to eat."

"Get some bacon," Al said. "I need some meat."

"I will," Pa said. He jumped down from the truck and Uncle John took his place.

When they pushed the planks into the car door, Ma awakened and sat up. “What you doin’?”

“Gonna build up a place to keep outa the wet.”

“Why?” Ma asked. “It’s dry in here.”

“Ain’t gonna be. Water’s comin’ up.”

Ma struggled up to her feet and went to the door. “We got to git outa here.”

“Can’t,” Al said. “All our stuff ’s here. Truck’s here. Ever’thing we got.”

“Where’s Pa?”

“Gone to get stuff for breakfas’.”

Ma looked down at the water. It was only six inches down from the floor by now. She went back to the mattress and looked at Rose of Sharon. The girl stared back at her.

“How you feel?” Ma asked.

“Tar’d. Jus’ tar’d out.”

“Gonna get some breakfas’ into you.”

“I ain’t hungry.”

Mrs. Wainwright moved beside Ma. “She looks all right. Come through it fine.”

Rose of Sharon’s eyes questioned Ma, and Ma tried to avoid the question. Mrs. Wainwright walked to the stove.

“Ma.”

“Yeah? What you want?”

“Is—it—all right?”

Ma gave up the attempt. She kneeled down on the mattress. “You can have more,” she said. “We done ever’thing we knowed.”

Rose of Sharon struggled and pushed herself up. “Ma!” “You couldn’ he’p it.”

The girl lay back again, and covered her eyes with her arms. Ruthie crept close and looked down in awe. She whispered harshly, “She sick, Ma? She gonna die?”

“’Course not. She’s gonna be awright. Awright.”

Pa came in with his armload of packages. “How is she?”

“Awright,” Ma said. “She’s gonna be awright.”

Ruthie reported to Winfield. “She ain’t gonna die. Ma says so.”

And Winfield, picking his teeth with a splinter in a very adult manner, said, “I knowed it all the time.”

“How’d you know?”

“I won’t tell,” said Winfield, and he spat out a piece of the splinter.

Ma built the fire up with the last twigs and cooked the bacon and made gravy. Pa had brought store bread. Ma scowled when she saw it. “We got any money lef’?”

“Nope,” said Pa. “But we was so hungry.”

“An’ you got store bread,” Ma said accusingly.

“Well, we was awful hungry. Worked all night long.”

Ma sighed. “Now what we gonna do?”

As they ate, the water crept up and up. Al gulped his food and he and Pa built the platform. Five feet wide, six feet long, four feet above the floor. And the water crept to the edge of the doorway, seemed to hesitate a long time, and then moved slowly inward over the floor. And outside, the rain began again, as it had before, big heavy drops splashing on the water, pounding hollowly on the roof.

Al said, “Come on now, let’s get the mattresses up. Let’s put the blankets up, so they don’t git wet.” They piled their possessions up on the platform, and the water crept over the floor. Pa and Ma, Al and Uncle John, each at a corner, lifted Rose of Sharon’s mattress, with the girl on it, and put it on top of the pile.

And the girl protested, “I can walk. I’m awright.” And the water crept over the floor, a thin film of it. Rose of Sharon whispered to Ma, and Ma put her hand under the blanket and felt her breast and nodded.

In the other end of the boxcar, the Wainwrights were pounding, building a platform for themselves. The rain thickened, and then passed away.

Ma looked down at her feet. The water was half an inch deep on the car floor by now. “You, Ruthie—Winfiel’!” she called distractedly. “Come get on top of the pile. You’ll get cold.” She saw them safely up, sitting awkwardly beside Rose of Sharon. Ma said suddenly, “We got to git out.”

“We can’t,” Pa said. “Like Al says, all our stuff’s here. We’ll pull off the boxcar door an’ make more room to set on.”

The family huddled on the platforms, silent and fretful. The water was six inches deep in the car before the flood spread evenly over the embankment and moved into the cotton field on the other side. During that day and night the men slept soddenly, side by side on the boxcar door. And Ma lay close to Rose of Sharon. Sometimes Ma whispered to her and sometimes sat up quietly, her face brooding. Under the blanket she hoarded the remains of the store bread.

The rain had become intermittent now—little wet squalls and quiet times. On the morning of the second day Pa splashed through the camp and came back with ten potatoes in his pockets. Ma watched him sullenly while he chopped out part of the inner wall of the car, built a fire, and scooped water into a pan. The family ate the steaming boiled potatoes with their fingers. And when this last food was gone, they stared at the gray water; and in the night they did not lie down for a long time.

When the morning came they awakened nervously. Rose of Sharon whispered to Ma.

Ma nodded her head. “Yes,” she said. “It’s time for it.” And then she turned to the car door, where the men lay. “We’re a-gettin’ outa here,” she said savagely, “gettin’ to higher groun’. An’ you’re comin’ or you ain’t comin’, but I’m takin’ Rosasharn an’ the little fellas outa here.”

“We can’t!” Pa said weakly.

“Awright, then. Maybe you’ll pack Rosasharn to the highway, any-ways, an’ then come back. It ain’t rainin’ now, an’ we’re a-goin’.”

“Awright, we’ll go,” Pa said.

Al said, “Ma, I ain’t goin’.”

“Why not?”

“Well—Aggie—why, her an’ me——”

Ma smiled. “’Course,” she said. “You stay here, Al. Take care of the stuff. When the water goes down—why, we’ll come back. Come quick, ’fore it rains again,” she told Pa. “Come on, Rosasharn. We’re goin’ to a dry place.”

“I can walk.”

“Maybe a little, on the road. Git your back bent, Pa.”

Pa slipped into the water and stood waiting. Ma helped Rose of Sharon down from the platform and steadied her across the car. Pa

took her in his arms, held her as high as he could, and pushed his way carefully through the deep water, around the car, and to the highway. He set her down on her feet and held onto her. Uncle John carried Ruthie and followed. Ma slid down into the water, and for a moment her skirts billowed out around her.

"Winfiel', set on my shoulder. Al—we'll come back soon's the water's down. Al —" She paused. "If—if Tom comes—tell him we'll be back. Tell him be careful. Winfiel'! Climb on my shoulder—there! Now, keep your feet still." She staggered off through the breast-high water. At the highway embankment they helped her up and lifted Winfield from her shoulder.

They stood on the highway and looked back over the sheet of water, the dark red blocks of the cars, the trucks and automobiles deep in the slowly moving water. And as they stood, a little misting rain began to fall.

"We got to git along," Ma said. "Rosasharn, you feel like you could walk?"

"Kinda dizzy," the girl said. "Feel like I been beat."

Pa complained, "Now we're a-goin', where' we goin'?"

"I dunno. Come on, give your han' to Rosasharn." Ma took the girl's right arm to steady her, and Pa her left. "Goin' someplace where it's dry. Got to. You fellas ain't had dry clothes on for two days." They moved slowly along the highway. They could hear the rushing of the water in the stream beside the road. Ruthie and Winfield marched together, splashing their feet against the road. They went slowly along the road. The sky grew darker and the rain thickened. No traffic moved along the highway.

"We got to hurry," Ma said. "If this here girl gits good an' wet—I don't know what'll happen to her."

"You ain't said where-at we're a-hurryin' to," Pa reminded her sarcastically.

The road curved along beside the stream. Ma searched the land and the flooded fields. Far off the road, on the left, on a slight rolling hill a rain-blackened barn stood. "Look!" Ma said. "Look there! I bet it's dry in that barn. Le's go there till the rain stops."

Pa sighed. "Prob'ly get run out by the fella owns it."

Ahead, beside the road, Ruthie saw a spot of red. She raced to it. A scraggly geranium gone wild, and there was one rain-beaten

blossom on it. She picked the flower. She took a petal carefully off and stuck it on her nose. Winfield ran up to see.

"Lemme have one?" he said.

"No, sir! It's all mine. I foun' it." She stuck another red petal on her forehead, a little bright-red heart.

"Come on, Ruthie! Lemme have one. Come on, now." He grabbed at the flower in her hand and missed it, and Ruthie banged him in the face with her open hand. He stood for a moment, surprised, and then his lips shook and his eyes welled.

The others caught up. "Now what you done?" Ma asked.

"Now what you done?"

"He tried to grab my fl'ar."

Winfield sobbed, "I—on'y wanted one—to—stick on my nose."

"Give him one, Ruthie."

"Leave him find his own. This here's mine."

"Ruthie! You give him one."

Ruthie heard the threat in Ma's tone, and changed her tactics. "Here," she said with elaborate kindness. "I'll stick on one for you." The older people walked on. Winfield held his nose near to her. She wet a petal with her tongue and jabbed it cruelly on his nose. "You little son-of-a-bitch," she said softly. Winfield felt for the petal with his fingers, and pressed it down on his nose. They walked quickly after the others. Ruthie felt how the fun was gone. "Here," she said. "Here's some more. Stick some on your forehead."

From the right of the road there came a sharp swishing. Ma cried, "Hurry up. They's a big rain. Le's go through the fence here. It's shorter. Come on, now! Bear on, Rosasharn." They half dragged the girl across the ditch, helped her through the fence. And then the storm struck them. Sheets of rain fell on them. They plowed through the mud and up the little incline. The black barn was nearly obscured by the rain. It hissed and splashed, and the growing wind drove it along. Rose of Sharon's feet slipped and she dragged between her supporters.

"Pa! Can you carry her?"

Pa leaned over and picked her up. "We're wet through anyways," he said. "Hurry up. Winfiel'—Ruthie! Run on ahead."

They came panting up to the rain-soaked barn and staggered into

the open end. There was no door in this end. A few rusty farm tools lay about, a disk plow and a broken cultivator, an iron wheel. The rain hammered on the roof and curtained the entrance. Pa gently set Rose of Sharon down on an oily box. “God Awmighty!” he said.

Ma said, “Maybe they’s hay inside. Look, there’s a door.” She swung the door on its rusty hinges. “They is hay,” she cried. “Come on in, you.”

It was dark inside. A little light came in through the cracks between the boards.

“Lay down, Rosasharn,” Ma said. “Lay down an’ res’.I’ll try to figger some way to dry you off.”

Winfield said, “Ma!” and the rain roaring on the roof drowned his voice. “*Ma!*”

“What is it? What you want?”

“Look! In the corner.”

Ma looked. There were two figures in the gloom; a man who lay on his back, and a boy sitting beside him, his eyes wide, staring at the newcomers. As she looked, the boy got slowly up to his feet and came toward her. His voice croaked. “You own this here?”

“No,” Ma said. “Jus’ come in outa the wet. We got a sick girl. You got a dry blanket we could use an’ get her wet clothes off ?”

The boy went back to the corner and brought a dirty comfort and held it out to Ma.

“Thank ya,” she said. “What’s the matter’th that fella?”

The boy spoke in a croaking monotone. “Fust he was sick—but now he’s starvin’.”

“What?”

“Starvin’. Got sick in the cotton. He ain’t et for six days.”

Ma walked to the corner and looked down at the man. He was about fifty, his whiskery face gaunt, and his open eyes were vague and staring. The boy stood beside her. “Your pa?” Ma asked.

“Yeah! Says he wasn’ hungry, or he jus’ et. Give me the food. Now he’s too weak. Can’t hardly move.”

The pounding of the rain decreased to a soothing swish on the roof. The gaunt man moved his lips. Ma knelt beside him and put her ear close. His lips moved again.

“Sure,” Ma said. “You jus’ be easy. He’ll be awright. You jus’

wait'll I get them wet clo'es off'n my girl."

Ma went back to the girl. "Now slip 'em off," she said. She held the comfort up to screen her from view. And when she was naked, Ma folded the comfort about her.

The boy was at her side again explaining, "I didn' know. He said he et, or he wasn' hungry. Las' night I went an' bust a winda an' stoled some bread. Made 'im chew 'er down. But he puked it all up, an' then he was weaker. Got to have soup or milk. You folks got money to git milk?"

Ma said, "Hush. Don' worry. We'll figger somepin out."

Suddenly the boy cried, "He's dyin', I tell you! He's starvin' to death, I tell you."

"Hush," said Ma. She looked at Pa and Uncle John standing helplessly gazing at the sick man. She looked at Rose of Sharon huddled in the comfort. Ma's eyes passed Rose of Sharon's eyes, and then came back to them. And the two women looked deep into each other. The girl's breath came short and gasping.

She said "Yes."

Ma smiled. "I knowed you would. I knowed!" She looked down at her hands, tight-locked in her lap.

Rose of Sharon whispered, "Will—will you all—go out?" The rain whisked lightly on the roof.

Ma leaned forward and with her palm she brushed the tousled hair back from her daughter's forehead, and she kissed her on the forehead. Ma got up quickly. "Come on, you fellas," she called. "You come out in the tool shed."

Ruthie opened her mouth to speak. "Hush," Ma said. "Hush and git." She herded them through the door, drew the boy with her; and she closed the squeaking door.

For a minute Rose of Sharon sat still in the whispering barn. Then she hoisted her tired body up and drew the comfort about her. She moved slowly to the corner and stood looking down at the wasted face, into the wide, frightened eyes. Then slowly she lay down beside him. He shook his head slowly from side to side. Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast. "You got to," she said. She squirmed closer and pulled his head close. "There!" she said. "There." Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair. She looked up

and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously.